

# VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

SEPTEMBER 1997

ONE DOLLAR





## Director's Column

William L. Woodfin, Jr



Lee Walker

If you're looking for an exciting hunting opportunity in September, you need look no further than this year's early resident goose season. Running from September 2 through September 25, it allows hunters to get to the field for good wingshooting and also gives them an opportunity early in the fall to polish their public image.

As with all hunting and fishing, access to the right area is critical for successful September resident goose hunting. Sometimes the spot that will produce the best results requires access through private property, and that's where improving the public perception of the hunter comes in.

Landowners who are suffering from an overabundance of resident geese might be glad to receive requests for access to their property. In this situation, a hunter might offer a real service to a landowner. However, it is vital to remember that no matter how much a landowner might want to reduce the number of geese, unannounced visitors carry-

ing hunting equipment can be unnerving. Asking for permission to hunt is the ethical way to gain access, and if permission is denied you have still done something positive for the hunting community by following the wishes of the landowner.

The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF) has received many good reactions to the early goose season, one of which is that it's really not too early to go waterfowling. We should add that goose hunters will be pleased with their opportunities. According to the statistics of our Wildlife Division, the resident goose population is increasing 10 percent annually. For management purposes, we hope you will have some successful days during resident goose season. The bag limit is five daily and 10 in possession.

The Virginia Women in the Outdoors Program is having a specialty workshop weekend with concurrent sessions on deer hunting and turkey hunting, September 19-21, at Smith Mountain Lake 4-H Center near Bedford, Virginia. If you are interested in participating, contact Libby Norris at (757) 253-4180, by fax (757) 253-4182, or by E-mail at [lnorris@dgif.state.va.us](mailto:lnorris@dgif.state.va.us), or by regular mail at The Virginia Women in the Outdoors Program, the VDGIF Region I Office, 5806 Mooretown Road, Williamsburg, Virginia, 23188. Let her know if you're interested in the deer or turkey workshop.

September 27, 1997 is the 26th annual National Hunting and Fishing Day. National Hunting and Fishing Day helps elevate conservation awareness and wildlife management consciousness, and we're proud to be a part of it.

The VDGIF will observe the day in coordination with the Fairfax

County Park Authority with a large outdoor event at Fairfax County's Burke Lake. Our hunter education instructors will participate in some of the exhibit and instructional opportunities. Along with them, attendees will see a National Wild Turkey Federation exhibit, have a look at muzzleloading gear with the Izaak Walton League, see retriever demonstrations sponsored by Ducks Unlimited, observe fly tying with Trout Unlimited, and learn about archery with the Archers of Fort Belvoir. The exhibit circuit will be located at stations around the VDGIF boat ramp, and will be accessible from the many trails that wind around Burke Lake. For more information about this event, contact John Odenkirk or Dan Lovelace at (540) 899-4169, or through E-mail respectively at [jodenkirk@dgif.state.va.us](mailto:jodenkirk@dgif.state.va.us) or [dlovelace@dgif.state.va.us](mailto:dlovelace@dgif.state.va.us).

Two other events that will appeal to birders are the Eastern Shore Birding Festival held on October 3-5 and the Watchable Wildlife Conference to be held in Roanoke, November 11-15. For more information on the Birding Festival, see our article on page 32 of this issue. For complete details about the Watchable Wildlife Conference contact the Division of Continuing Education, Mail Code 0104, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, Virginia 24061, or fax (540) 231-9886.

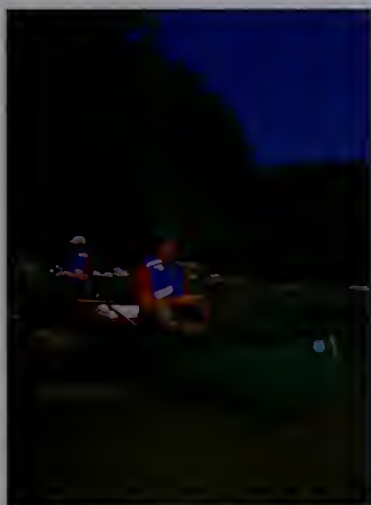
Finally, congratulations are due to Bob Gooch for winning second place in this year's small game writing contest sponsored by the Outdoor Writers Association of America. We're proud that the winning story, "Beagles and Bunnies," appeared in *Virginia Wildlife*. Bob has another good story for us this month, also on small game. And we hope to publish many more. Thanks, Bob.

### Mission Statement

To manage Virginia's wildlife and inland fish to maintain optimum populations of all species to serve the needs of the Commonwealth; to provide opportunity for all to enjoy wildlife, inland fish, boating and related outdoor recreation; to promote safety for persons and property in connection with boating, hunting and fishing.

# VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

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*The Fall River Renaissance recognizes the importance of rivers such as the Clinch River in southwestern Virginia; page 16.*



*There are memorable deer hunts, and then there are once-in-a-lifetime hunts; page 25.*

*Cover: Photo by ©Scotty Lovett. Back cover: ©Bill Lea.*

## Features

- 4 Gettin' After the Residents** by Chris Steuart  
If you think hunting waterfowl is only a cold weather pursuit, think again.
- 8 Squirrels At Cutting Time** by Bob Gooch  
Award-winning writer Bob Gooch tells us why we should go squirrel hunting.
- 12 River Duck Hunting in Virginia** by Gerald Almy  
Virginia has many rivers, and almost all of them will have ducks this winter.
- 17 Clinch River Float and Fishing Trips**  
by Tom Hampton and John Jessee  
Come and have a close look at one of Virginia's finest river resources.
- 25 My Greatest Deer Hunt** by Mike Roberts  
Twenty-five years ago wildlife photographer Mike Roberts went deer hunting with a young man dying of cancer. It was an unforgettable day.

## September Journal

- |            |                     |
|------------|---------------------|
| 31 News    | 36 September Afield |
| 34 Habitat | 37 Photo Tips       |
| 35 Recipes | 38 Safety           |

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*Dedicated to the Conservation of Virginia's Wildlife and Natural Resources*



# Gettin' After

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by Chris Steuart

**T**he honk of the geese sounded distant and flat in the early morning fog that draped Fluvanna County Farm. The pond was glasslike until the pair of wood ducks landed and rippled the surface. On the hillside, 80 geese of the fake kind—silhouettes, shells and floaters—awaited the arrival of the real birds.

The morning dew was heavy enough to soak through pant cuffs and stick to the calf. The skies above the fog were dark and threatened a soaking rain.

That's dew, not frost. Rain, not snow or ice. This was an early September resident goose hunt. Traditional migratory goose-hunting nay sayers had predicted a bug-swatting adventure with the sun beating down. They said the birds were too tame to hunt, the weather was too hot. "You're supposed to hunt geese in the winter and call them into decoys, not just walk up and shoot them," they insisted.

These geese may not fly high amidst the snow flakes, but they weren't just sitting around waiting to be shot.

"If you do it right and set up the decoys and shoot the birds coming into you then it is a lot of fun. You can hardly tell the difference in hunting these birds and hunting migrant birds," said Gary Costanzo, a waterfowl biologist with the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF), as he finished setting up his decoys.

From the backside of the farmhouse a flock of geese took flight and headed toward the pond. The crowd of decoys seemed to come to life as Costanzo and Bob Ellis, the assistant chief of VDGIF's Wildlife Division,

# the Residents

## In the September Canada Goose Season

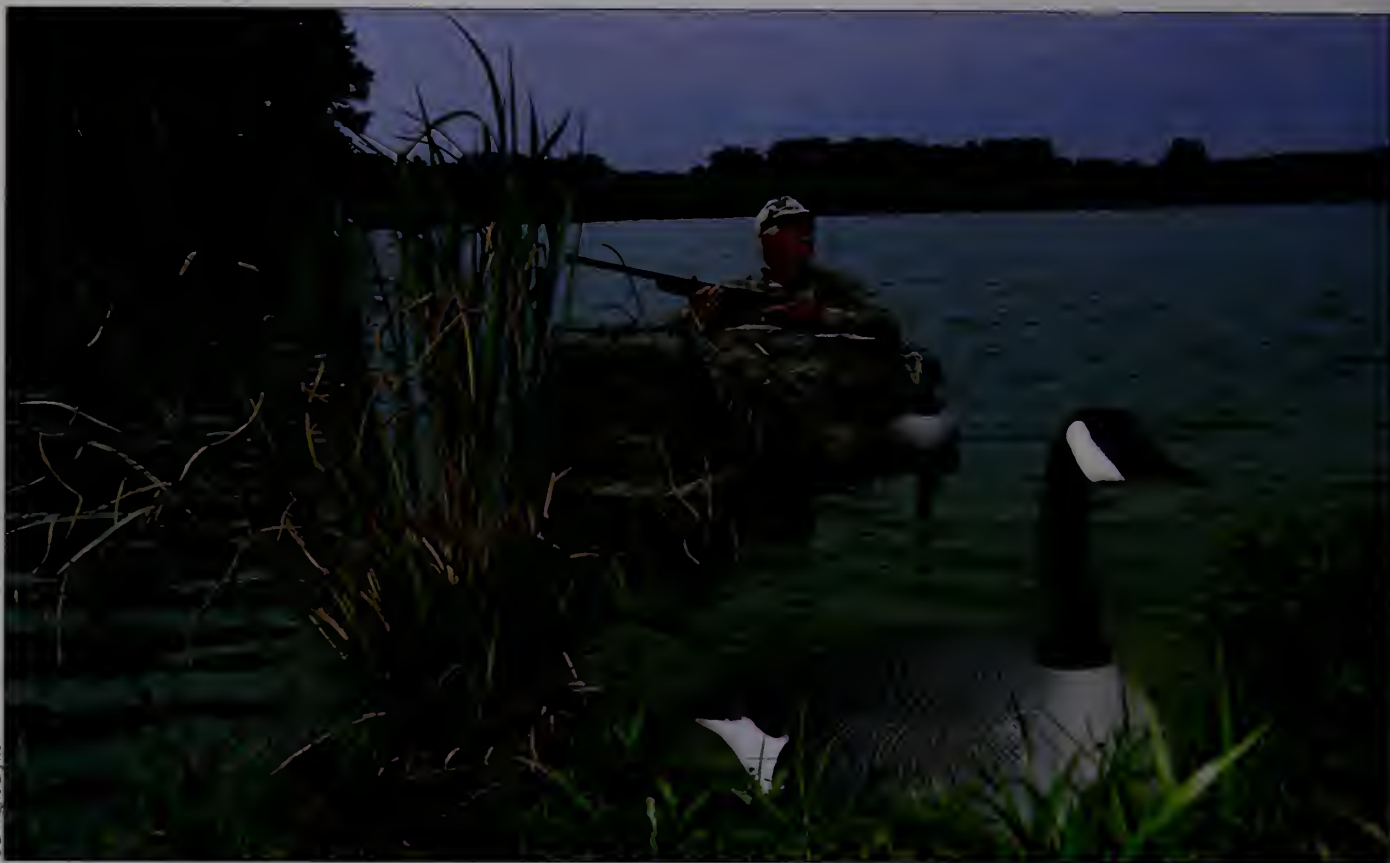
made a series of calls. Several geese peeled off from a larger flock and returned the calls as they sailed through the dense fog. Six geese broke out of the fog, sailing high over the earthen dam where several cows were taking an early-morning bath. The scene was perfect until the birds casually glided to the far side of the pond, staying out of shotgun range. They lit on a knoll about 125 yards away.

"That was pretty! I thought they were coming right in," said Ellis. "It got my heart going."

So far nobody was missing the bone-numbing cold of the traditional late migratory goose season. Hunters have been without that season since 1995 when the U.S. Fish



*Although waterfowling in the warm weather of September still sounds odd to some hunters, those who participate know the value of the early goose season. As you set up your decoys and make ready to call the geese in, there is one thing you will miss, and that's the numbing cold of the migratory season.*



and Wildlife Service closed the season because populations were dwindling. And the predictions of an easy hunt were missing their mark, as these geese were proving to be as finicky as their migratory cousins.

Not long after the unsociable flock chose the other knoll, a single goose appeared out of the thinning fog, cupped its wings and decoyed into the spread. That bird fell with a single load of No. 1 steel shot. Steel shot is required for hunting waterfowl in Virginia.

By the end of the morning hunt, five geese had been bagged. But it was the flock of approximately 200 geese that flew to a nearby grain field that tantalized the hunting party by flanking the pond out of shooting range.

"The main thing about these birds is to be where they want to go. Those geese saw our decoys and they said 'Yeah, ok we see the decoys, but we are going to go land over here,' Costanzo said. "I think that is what makes resident birds

hard to harvest. They are not just going to come to your decoys just because you have them out and they want to join other geese. They don't have to go join other geese. The resident birds have their own cliques."

Contrary to popular goose lore, resident geese and migratory geese are not birds of a feather and they don't flock together. "The resident population did not come from migratory geese stopping in Virginia and liking it here better than Canada," Costanzo said. "These originated as tame birds that were swapped around by landowners."

For the last half century or more this landowner passed a few geese to that landowner and the geese multiplied at private ponds. Then wildlife officials relocated the birds from this spot to that spot to ease overcrowding and introduce the population to new ranges. The result has been an overabundance of geese that call Virginia home. Similar problems have been found along the East Coast.

"Landowners like it when there

are 10 geese. When there are 20 they say it is a lot, but they still like them. Then all of a sudden there are 50 geese around and they say get those geese the heck out of here," Costanzo said.

The VDGIF opened the resident goose season in recent years to help manage populations of between 200 and 250 thousand from the marshes and rivers of the coast to the farm ponds in the rolling mountains of western Virginia. The harvest last year during the early season was approximately 6,000. A late season west of I-95 produced at least that many birds, but final numbers are not in. The resident population grows at an annual rate of 15 to 20 percent, so hunting pressure is needed to keep the population in check. This month the season opens Sept. 2 and lasts until Sept. 25.

"In rural areas like this we can control the birds through management. But when you get in urban areas like golf courses or airports, hunting alone can't solve the problem," Costanzo said. "You have to





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*Patience is a key to goose hunting, and the kind of blind a hunter chooses will make all the difference. This hunter has selected a goose silhouette blind with a chair that allows readiness as well as comfort. Above left: the hunter has chosen to hunt from a floating blind.*

use other methods, you have to harass them and chase them off."

Such urban areas often offer ideal goose habitat, with ponds and lush grass. But, when that grass is a fairway, a putting green or bordering an airport runway it becomes a problem. Aside from harassment by chasing or using noise makers, landowners can modify their habitat to make it less inviting to geese. Some golf courses allow hunting very early in the morning before golfers take to the course. It is easier to find places to hunt in more rural areas. Hunters need to seek permission from landowners well in advance of the hunt.

After finding a place to hunt, the most important step is scouting to pin down the birds' habits and select good locations to set up a decoy

spread or to get passing shots. Once hunters find a place and locate geese, the trick is to learn how to hunt resident geese. Resident geese are not as wary as migratory geese, but they get that way once they are shot at a few times.

"They smarten up a little bit. We don't hunt the same area a lot because if you shoot at them too many times in a row you are going to lose your hunting spot, because they are going to go somewhere they won't get shot at," Costanzo said.

Hunters need to recognize that there are differences between the two populations. Migratory geese typically fly higher than resident birds, are more vocal and second chances are scarce because they are more wary since they are unfamiliar with the area.

Resident birds, however, are at home. And just like the easy chair on Sunday, the first half dozen geese that came to the pond that September morning knew exactly where they could plop down, see the sites and get a bite to eat. Geese that call

Virginia their home have regular patterns. Hunters can't expect them to change that pattern very much, although the birds are just finishing



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their molt in September and grow more restless. The geese know where the best spots to roost are, they know where the food is and they know where the water is.

*Chris Steuart is an outdoor writer residing in Roanoke.*

# SQUIRRELS AT CUTTING TIME

©Lloyd B. Hill

by Bob Gooch

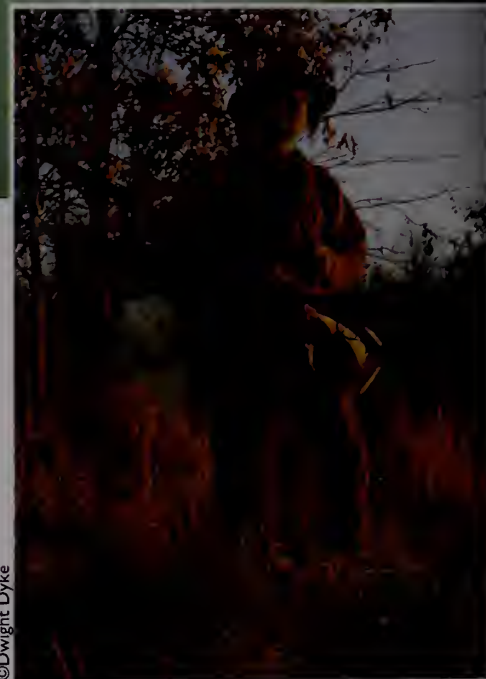
**S**ome hunters tend to look down their noses at squirrels. "They're all right for kids," they say. But here's one aging hunter who has sought Virginia squirrels for over half a century, who has pursued more glamorous game all over North America, who will tell you that a squirrel hunt can help regenerate a sometimes sagging spirit, and keep the shooting eye sharp.

Squirrel hunting is good in Virginia, and so it has been since before the Europeans ever reached these

shores. It has even been suggested that without the frisky little squirrel there may never have been a United States of America.

Writing in *Sports Afield*, Tom McIntyre pointed out that when the early settlers first stepped ashore, the eastern half of the continent was an unbroken hardwood forest. He credits the little animal's penchant for burying nuts for the abundance of hardwoods. With an estimated population of one billion gray squirrels, a lot of trees can be planted.

With that many squirrels it was not unusual for a squirrel hunter to kill several hundred animals a day and then collect bounties from farm-



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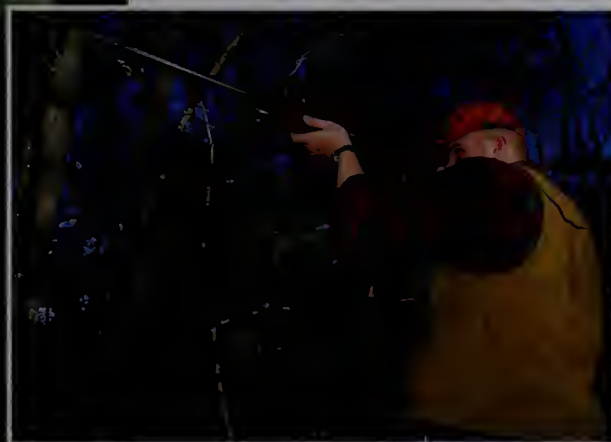
Early American rifles were designed to be lighter and had longer barrels which extended their range for small game such as squirrels.



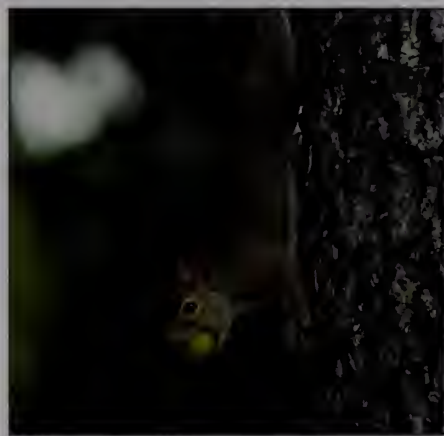
So goes the story of the gray squirrel's contribution to the winning of American independence. Much of the scenario was carried out right here in the Old Dominion.

Years later the likes of Daniel Boone and John James Audubon used the same rifle to "bark" squirrels, placing a round ball in the tree so close to the critter that the concussion would stun it and knock it to the ground. And no less a hunter than Hemingway sent Nick Adams to the "tall trees" to hunt squirrels, and Faulkner sent his boy to the "big

young-of-the-year furnish much of the early hunting, hunting at "cutting time," when they are feeding aggressively in ripe nut trees—hickory and oak primarily. Squirrels present a small target at any season, and by nature they are wary with strong vision and sharp ears. Sensing danger, they can flatten out on a tree branch and be all but impossible to detect. And trying to locate a squirrel feeding quietly in a big oak or hickory in full foliage can be a real puzzle. You see and hear the nut fragments sifting down through the



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woods" on the same mission.

Those frisky gray squirrels that are found everywhere from the capital grounds in Richmond to the most remote wilderness areas in Virginia have a rich tradition to flaunt before the modern hunter.

Now how do you go about hunting this amazing little critter that has contributed so much to the development of America?

Depending upon the season, bagging a gray squirrel can be relatively easy or extremely difficult. The easy hunting comes in late summer, even before the leaves begin to turn, and the most difficult comes in January after the critters have been hunted hard for months, their ranks thinned by hunting, predators, and extremely harsh winter weather. You are hunting the survivors then, hardy and wary critters—animals with good genes to produce hardy broods of young for next year's crop.

Hunting squirrels can be a challenge at any season, but the naive

*Squirrel hunting early in the fall is a wonderful way to practice for the late big game seasons. In some areas of Virginia the season opens in September. Above left: squirrel hunting in Westmoreland County, Virginia.*

leaves. He's up there gnawing on a nut, but just try to locate him.

Virginia's squirrel season is long. Somewhere in the state there is hunting from the first Saturday in September through January. That's five long months of uninterrupted hunting. The September hunting is limited to the Southside and Southwest Virginia counties of Bedford, Bland, Botetourt, Brunswick (except Fort Pickett), Buchanan, Campbell, Carroll, Charlotte, Craig, Dickenson (except Fort Pickett), Dinwiddie, Floyd, Franklin, Giles, Grayson, Greenville, Halifax, Henry, Lee, Lunenburg, Mecklenburg, Montgomery, Nottoway (except Fort Pickett), Patrick, Pittsylvania, Pulaski, Roanoke, Russell, Scott, Smyth, Southampton, Tazewell, Washington, Wise, and Wythe.

ers whose crops may have been damaged by squirrels.

Apparently an early need for an American hunting rifle that handled lighter rifle balls and less powder led to the development of 40 and 50-caliber flintlocks to replace the traditional 60 and 70-caliber blunderbusses. The result was a truly American rifle that was much lighter and more accurate at long ranges. When it came time for a young America to wrest its freedom from the British crown, the old English musket, which apparently wasn't much of a threat beyond 100 yards, was no match for the American squirrel rifle that was on the money out to 300 yards.

Squirrels are also fair game during the bowhunting season which runs from October 4 to November 8.

The gray is by far the most abundant squirrel in Virginia, but there is also a good population of the larger fox squirrels in the western part of the state. They are legal west of the Blue Ridge Mountains during the regular squirrel seasons and also in the counties of Fairfax, Fauquier, Loudoun, and Rappahannock—but not on the Chester F. Phelps Wildlife Management Area in Fauquier County.

"The squirrels are cutting," was a comment I frequently heard as a youngster growing up on a Virginia farm. It was a signal to break out the little single-shot .22 rifle with its crude open sights and head for a hickory tree or a forest edge near a ripe cornfield. Yes, centuries later, the critters still ravaged ripe corn. The season opened September first then, though the early season was eliminated a few years after my initiation to squirrel hunting.

My county now opens its hardwoods in early October, a good time to begin hunting squirrels. As much as I enjoyed those cool September dawns in the squirrel woods, I must admit I prefer October. In September too many are infested with unsightly botflies which we called "wolves." The squirrels are safe to eat because skinning the animals removes the pests.

I wrote a book on squirrel hunting a number of years ago and in doing so worked with game managers throughout the South where squirrel hunting is the most popular. There was debate about the best time to start the season, and in a sound management decision, the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries decided that the September opening in some areas would be a good idea.

To sample a true experience of hunting "squirrels at cutting time" you need to plan a September hunt to one of the above counties. There is plenty of public hunting land in many, particularly those in Southwest Virginia. Ideally, you should allow a half day before your hunt to



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*Squirrel hunting is a good way for young hunters to learn necessary outdoor and shooting skills. Although the .22 is preferred by some, a small gauge shotgun is also a good choice for squirrel hunting. This hunt took place in Chesterfield County, Virginia.*

do a little scouting to locate a hickory or oak tree where squirrels are actively feeding. You may spook a few when you arrive, but study the forest floor for nut fragments. If the population feeding in the tree is large, the ground will be all but covered with the fragments. That's your

tree. Plan on being there before dawn the next morning.

Look for a good spot where you will enjoy fair concealment, and if you are hunting with a .22 rifle also locate a rest for your rifle, the low branch of a small tree, for example. Fix both the stand and the rest firmly



in mind so you will be able to locate them in the dark the next morning—if you plan a dawn hunt. That's the most spectacular time to be in the squirrel woods. An early sunrise can be a joy to behold. It's also the most likely time to be assured of some game.

Insects can be a problem early in the season. Mosquitoes are not overly abundant in most Virginia hardwoods. Gnats and other "no-sees" can be worse. Take along some insect repellent. Tiny seed ticks are the major objection I have to early September squirrel hunting. They hang in clusters on blades of grass and if you happen to brush one, you're immediately covered with the little pests. To avoid them as much as possible stuff your trousers down in your socks and then into knee-length boots. Finally spray the boots thoroughly with insect repellent. Take the can along and repeat the process at least once during the morning.

On a dawn hunt plan on being on your stand a few minutes before daylight. The squirrels will begin moving to the nut tree soon after.

If you're shooting a .22 rifle, which I do 99 percent of the time, await a good clear shot and squeeze the trigger. Make a clean shot and the squirrel will tumble to the forest floor and lay still. Don't rush out to pick it up. Mark its location and wait. On a good morning it's possible you may take your limit of six squirrels without moving from your stand. In fact, not moving improves your chances of doing so. The mild report of the little .22 won't disturb the animals for long. Pretty soon they are feeding again and your chances are renewed. Rushing out there to recover your game will be much more disturbing than a dozen shots. If a squirrel hits the ground and moves in an attempt to escape, down it with a second shot.

That's dawn hunting for "squirrels at cutting time."

Another good time for those who do not like to arise before dawn is the hour before sunset. Hunting from then until the half-hour after sunset, end of legal hunting time, is

often productive. The tactics are otherwise the same as at dawn.

Squirrels tend to feed some throughout the day, so if dawn and dusk are not possible go when you can.

When the remainder of the state is opened to squirrel hunting in mid-October, conditions have changed considerably. For one thing hunting is more comfortable. The first frost of the year has long since sent the insects and ticks scurrying. You can put away the insect repellent until the spring gobbler season opens approximately six months down the line.

Unfortunately, most of those nut trees that served as a magnet to squirrels back in early September have lost much of their charm. They may still draw a few squirrels at dawn or dusk, but the "squirrel cutting time" has pretty much disappeared until next season. There is still plenty of foliage on the trees, but the hickories are a golden autumn color and even the oaks are turning various shades of brown. Gums and other trees throw in a little red to add to the charm of the autumn squirrel woods.

The squirrel populations, however, are still at their annual peak of abundance and the hunting can be good. There are no botflies to worry about now, and even the young of late summer have grown noticeably. Except for the fading "cutting time," it's a joyful time to be in the woods.

A few squirrels still visit those nut trees, and a stand nearby should produce some shooting, but October is the beginning of the still-hunting season when you use the creep, stop, look, and listen deer hunting approach on squirrels. It's good practice for the deer firearms season only a month away. As the cold weather approaches, waiting at an active den tree at dawn or dusk can be more productive than waiting at a nut tree. But that's another story.

Modern warfare is far removed from the fighting methods and weapons used in the American Revolution, and we're not likely to see the critter make another major contribution to weapons development

as we did with the advent of the .40 and .50 caliber rifle. But squirrels still provide a satisfying hunt. If you don't know how satisfying, you should grab your .22 and find out this year. □



Bob Gooch of Troy, Virginia, has been an outdoor writer for a long time, and he's still making his mark.

Gooch has written a syndicated newspaper column, "Virginia Afield," since 1962; he has authored more than 2,000 magazine articles for nationally known publications; he has written 14 books on hunting and fishing; he is a charter member of the Virginia Outdoor Writers Association, past president of the Mason-Dixon Outdoor Writers Association and has been a member of the national Outdoor Writers Association of America since 1962.

Now, *Virginia Wildlife* congratulates Bob Gooch for his most recent writing award. The prestigious award was a second place in this year's small game writing contest sponsored by the Outdoor Writers Association of America.

The winning story appeared in *Virginia Wildlife*, November, 1996. It was "Beagles and Bunnies," based on a winter rabbit hunt in Gooch's native Fluvanna County, Virginia. *Virginia Wildlife* has published Gooch's stories for years, and it's satisfying to see the work of a frequent contributor receive recognition.

Congratulations, Bob.



# River Duck Hunting in Virginia



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by Gerald Almy

Cutting hard with the sculling paddle, I struggled to keep the camouflaged johnboat close to the inside river bend as we floated down the North Fork of the Shenan-

doah. As we turned and swept into the fresh new stretch of water, a raucous quacking and flapping of wings erupted from our right. A pair of mallards had burst out from a tangle of deadfalls and brush and were quickly accelerating downstream.

*Opportunities to duck hunt on a creek or a river are available to almost every Virginian within an hour's drive or less from their homes.*

My partner's autoloader leapt quickly to his shoulder and with two shots, the drake fell to the water as the hen cut back over the trees and disappeared into the cold, gray December sky. We picked him up and continued our expedition. The

first duck of the day was in the bag.

Two more would come our way float hunting from the boat, while another would sneak up a side slough on foot. Later, at a point below an island we set out half a dozen decoys and lured in the final two ducks of our three-per man quota. This was back when waterfowl weren't as abundant as today and five bird limits were unthinkable.

But whether you and your partner are trying to bag ten ducks or six ducks, or even if you just want to get out alone for a quick afternoon hunt and chance to reawaken sensibilities numbed from too much work, Virginia's rivers are a good place to turn to.

Maybe if I'd grown up in an eastern Virginia setting where marshes were common and duck clubs and waterfowl hunting from blinds were the norm, I would have a different concept of this sport. But haunting the fields, woods, and flowing waters of central and western Virginia in my youth made duck hunting a do-it-yourself sport. Thirty years later, the hunting is still excellent on waters such as the Shenandoah, Rappahannock, Roanoke, James and Rapidan, as well as countless smaller flowages.

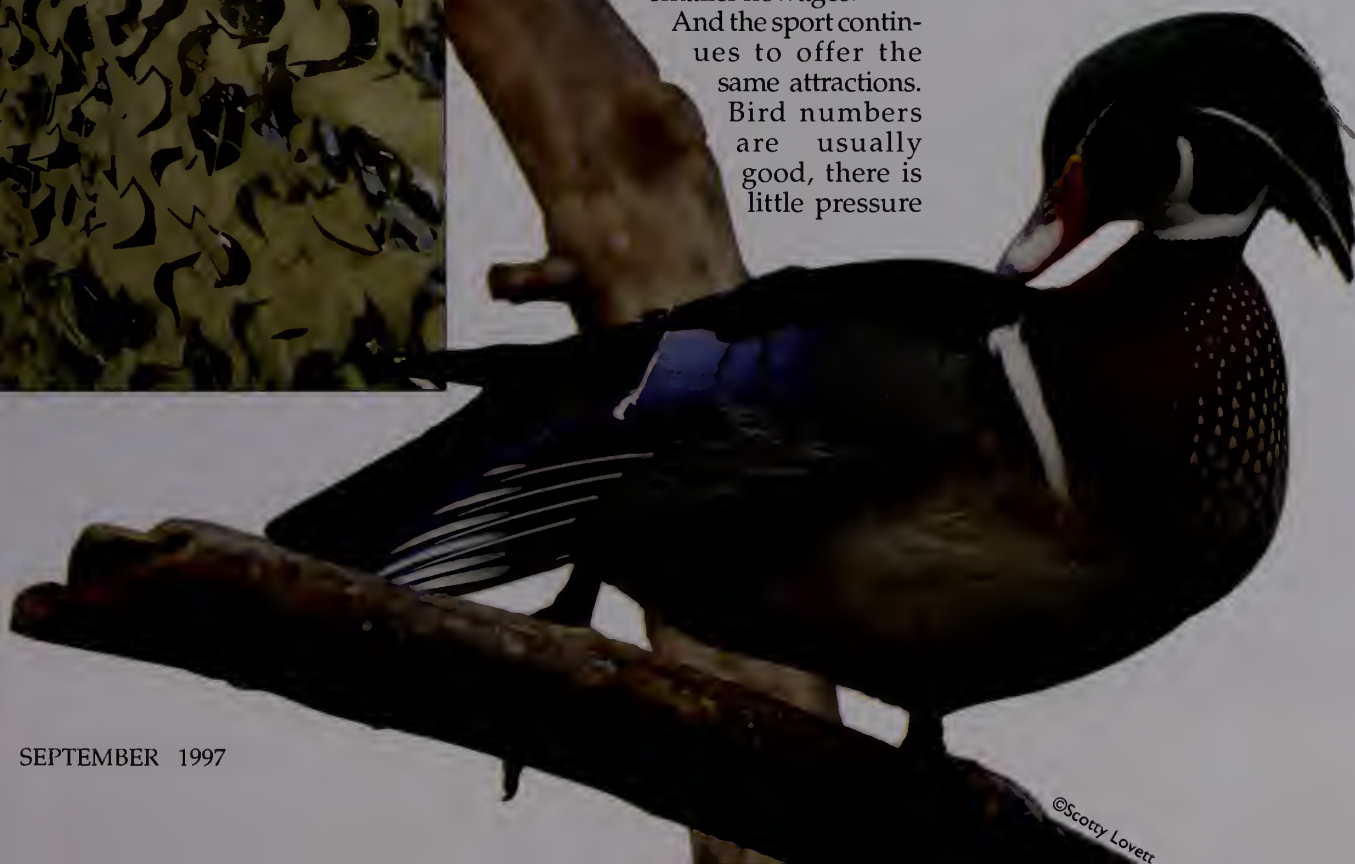
And the sport continues to offer the same attractions. Bird numbers are usually good, there is little pressure

from other hunters, and you don't have to belong to an exclusive duck club or have the right connections to be able to hunt them. No guide is required and you need not book your trip months in advance. When the season is in and the urge hits and conditions look right, simply head to the nearest river or creek. Little equipment is required, and you don't even have to know how to use a call.

On top of this, there is the added attraction of flowing water and the adrenalin rush that comes from floating downstream, seeing new vistas at every turn in the river instead of looking at the same scene all day long.

Another attraction of rivers and streams is that they are abundant throughout the state and almost all of them hold ducks. A vast vein-like network of these flowages snake their way across Virginia, supporting species that range from tiny blue-winged teal to big, majestic black ducks. Virtually anyone can be on a good to excellent duck river or creek in an hour's drive or less.

December and January are particularly good months to turn to rivers, since many of the state's lakes and ponds are freezing up at this time, concentrating birds on open flowing





waters. This is also when the most birds will be present as cold weather drives them south.

Many small and medium-sized creeks offer good hunting potential as well as the large flowages we'll name. It's impossible to list all of these, but you can probably find several worth checking out by scouting back country roads and consulting topographic maps, or just thinking about the places you fish in summer. If the water is considered navigable, you don't need permission to hunt it as long as you stay in the boat. If you want to jump shoot from shore, you either have to obtain permission to hunt or stay on public land. Sometimes homes are situated right on the edge of creeks and rivers, though, so be careful no structures are around when you shoot at your quarry.

To float hunt rivers east of Interstate 95 you need a "floating blind" permit. These are available from the Virginia Department of Game and

Inland Fisheries (VDGIF), P.O. Box 11104, Richmond, VA 23230; 804/367-1000, and from sporting goods stores. Waters west of Interstate 95 do not require a permit. You still must have a valid hunting license, however, as well as a Federal Migratory Waterfowl Stamp, sold at U.S. post offices.

Three strategies are useful for Virginia's rivers and streams—1) stalking or jump shooting birds from the bank, 2) float hunting, and 3) setting out decoys. Depending on the nature of the cover, abundance and type of ducks, wariness of the waterfowl, whether you have permission to trespass from adjacent landowners, time of day and other factors, you might want to use one, two, or all three of these methods on any given day.

Jump shooting from the bank is best on small and medium flowages, though at times I also use it on large rivers as well. If a stream is too shallow to float, this is also the best op-

tion. On the narrower waters, any duck that flushes will likely be in range when it bursts off the water. Small streams also typically have trees and brush along shore, lots of bends and elevated banks. These are all features that will help you sneak up close to the quarry before it flushes.

Wear camouflage or drab colored clothing when jump shooting and sneak quietly along, parallel to the stream. If cover is thick, you can stay close to the bank. If it's sparse, stay 15 to 30 yards back from the water's edge, but loop up close to the bank every 40 to 60 yards or so to check for ducks. Use any cover available such as stumps or trees as you move up to the water.

The stalk-and-jump approach also is effective on broader creeks, particularly when you spot ducks far ahead on a float, but the river is too open and clean to drift up close enough for a shot. Ease quietly to shore in this situation and send one



*Stalking or jump shooting from the banks of rivers and creeks can work well for ducks. Here, a hunter moves along the water in the James River Wildlife Management Area, owned by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. The James River WMA is in the heart of Virginia's piedmont. To obtain A Guide to Virginia Wildlife Management Areas, send \$5 for shipping and handling to V.I.B., P.O. Box 27563, Richmond, VA 23261. You may get one for no charge at our regional offices or the main office in Richmond.*



hunter back through the woods or fields along the bank on a circular stalk that brings him up just below the ducks. By bending over, creeping carefully, even crawling if necessary, the circling hunter should be able to get close enough for a shot on the jump. If the other hunter sits still in the boat or hides in brush along shore upstream, he can often get a crack at the ducks as they fly upstream past him. Improved cylinder is generally the best choke for jump shooting, with size 4 to 6 shot.

Float hunting is a good option for rivers and medium-sized streams with sufficient flow and depth so that you do not scrape bottom continuously and scare birds out of range. It's also a good approach when there are lots of bends in the river or cover such as brush and logjams along shore that will hold birds until you drift into shooting range.

Spray paint your boat in splotches of drab olive, gray and brown or tie a few brushes on the bow to break up your human outline. Canoes, johnboats and rafts can all be used, but always wear a Coast Guard approved flotation vest and avoid any potentially dangerous rapids. Either don't float that stretch or portage around it. Also carry waterproof matches or a butane lighter and a change of clothes and space blanket in a waterproof boat sack, in case of a mishap. Canoes should only be used if you are familiar with these craft and know how vital keeping a low center of gravity and good balance are to avoid capsizing. A summer dunking in a river can be good for a laugh. In winter, it could spell tragedy.

The hunter in the stern should always keep his shotgun pointing away from the bow person with the safety on. Only birds that flare and fly upstream past him should be shot at. Some hunters use even more caution, keeping the boat handler's gun unloaded. His main job, after all, is steering the craft and sculling noiselessly into range of ducks spotted along the shoreline, and close to logjams and islands that might have birds present that can't be seen.

Switch positions a couple times during the float to stretch muscles and allow both hunters to have a fair crack at the ducks.

I have float hunted successfully alone, but if you do so, always tell someone where you are going and when you expect to finish.

Good half-day floats should encompass 4-6 miles of river. For a day-long outing, you can bite off as much as 8-10 miles, but make sure you know you can finish the float before sunset. Floating a river in winter after dark is no fun.

If you're using a single barrel gun, go with modified for float hunting, since birds often get up near the outer edge of shooting range, particularly late in the season. With a double, improved and modified is a good combination.

Hunting over decoys is the third way to go after river ducks. This is not as commonly employed as the other two methods, but it's also a good tactic. The first and last hour of daylight are best for this approach. Then the birds tend to be flying out to feed or back to roost.

It's most useful on broad, slow rivers. Prescout by watching in mornings and evenings for flights moving up and down the river or settling into a bar or backeddy over a distant beeline. You can either set up a portable blind, build a quick one from shoreline brush, or simply hunker down next to a logjam.

Eddies, points of land, the downstream edge of islands, and riffles are all good places to set your decoys. You don't need a lot for these inland ducks. They seldom gather in large groups, so more than 6-10 would look unnatural. You can mix species, but mallards will bring in just about any duck you see that might come to decoys. And while calling isn't necessary, if you have one and know how to use it, blowing it can help when birds are reluctant to come in close enough for a clean shot. □

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*Gerald Almy has been a full-time outdoor writer for more than 19 years. He is currently a hunting and fishing editor on the staff of Sports Afield.*

## *The Best Places*

Besides the countless small to medium-sized streams that are too numerous to list, here are some of the top rivers to try in Virginia this winter.

The Rappahannock, located in north-central Virginia, offers fine duck hunting west of the Interstate 95 bridge. From the area around Remington, down almost to Fredericksburg the river can be hunted by floating, setting out decoys or even jump shooting. VDGIF's 4,500 acre Chester F. Phelps Wildlife Management Area provides access in Fauquier County. There's a boat ramp here, and also on VA Rt 618, on the south shore of the river just west of Fredericksburg—a good take-out point. Watch out for a few tricky whitewater stretches and portage around them.

The Rapidan is a tributary of the Rappahannock and also a good bet for ducks. Access for float trips can be found at US 522, VA Rt 3 and VA Rt 610, all west of Fredericksburg.

The Shenandoah River with its famous bends offers hundreds of miles of duck hunting habitat. All three branches can hold birds—the North Fork, South Fork and main stem. Be aware of dams and rapids that you might have to carry the boat around by studying topos before embarking on the trip.

The James is a classic duck hunting river and offers several hundred miles of topnotch waterfowling. The James River Wildlife Management Area lies along the river with a boat launch available, 15 miles southwest of Lovington. The Hard-ware River WMA also provides access at a launch just above where this river merges with the James.

The Appomattox is another productive duck river. Access is available through the Amelia WMA.

The Roanoke is most famous for its striper run in spring, but it also is a choice duck hunting river. Set decoys out or try float hunting this river from the Leesville Lake tailwaters downstream to Buggs Island Lake. Blacks, mallards, wigeon and gadwall are possible. □



Photos by Dwight Doyle



**FALL RIVER RENAISSANCE**

# An Opportunity for Volunteerism to Shine

## Fall River Renaissance

Virginia is a treasure chest packed with human history as well as environmental diversity. Both aspects of state pride can be attributed to the abundance of waters that define her landscape. From the mountain headwaters streams to the sweeping Atlantic Ocean, fish, wildlife and people have carved out their niches in relation to this resource.

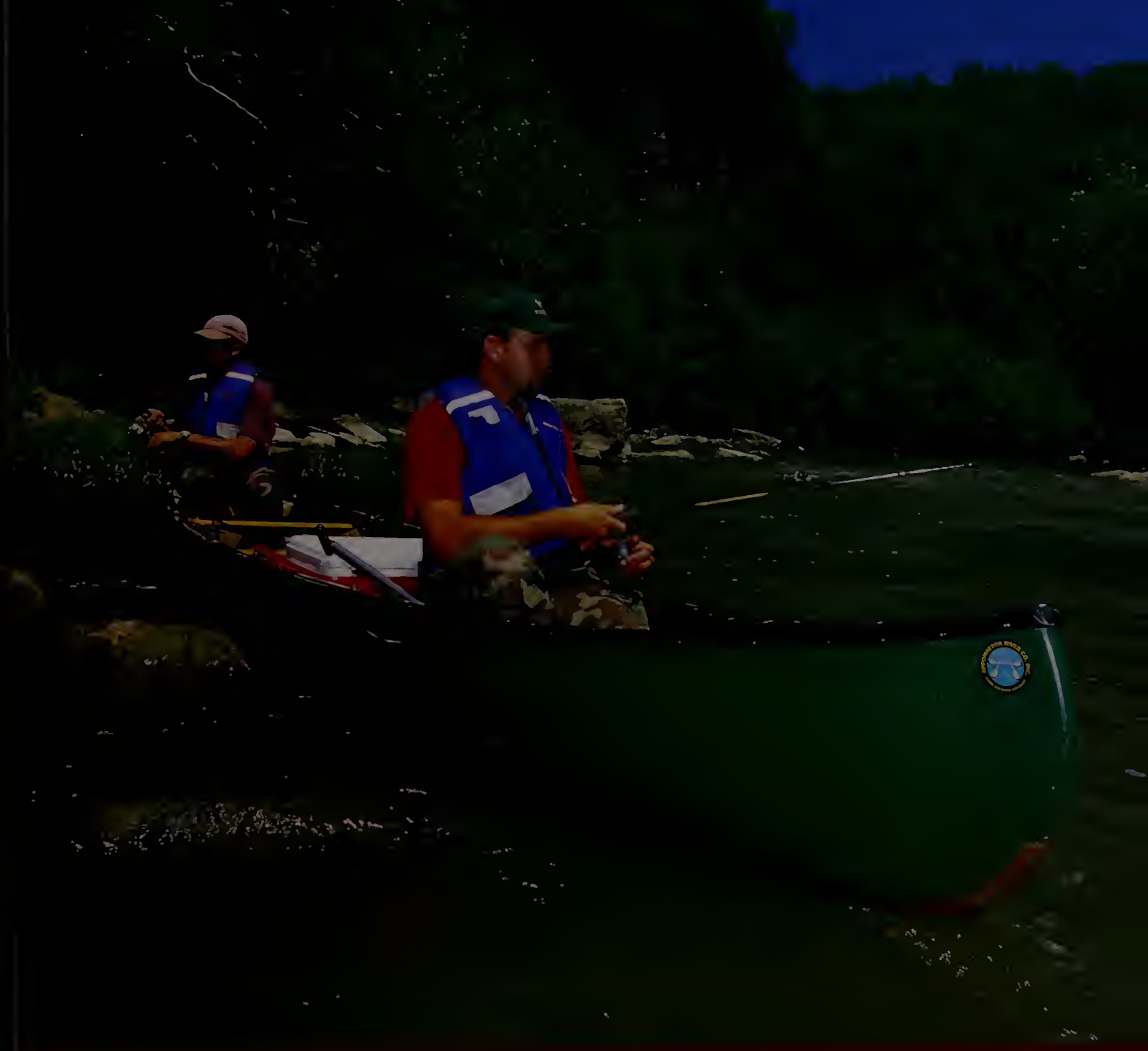
By taking an active role in water stewardship, the people of Virginia can help to conserve and enhance the waters that provide important benefits now and for future generations. And the Fall River Renaissance provides a great opportunity to start. It is a month long campaign, from September 20 through October 20, 1997, to encourage Virginians to learn about, enjoy and care for our state's magnificent aquatic resources.

You, your family, your church, your organization or your business, can get involved and make a difference. Plan a program, event or outing where you learn about, recreate in or improve our water resources. You will be joining forces with hundreds of other volunteers who are "getting into the water." By registering your efforts in the Fall River Renaissance campaign, all participants will receive a certificate of recognition from Governor George Allen. For ideas on how you can get involved, call 1-800-592-5482.

The Fall River Renaissance is an Allen Administration campaign to further the efforts of those Virginians who are doing volunteer work to conserve and improve the rivers and waters of the Commonwealth. The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries is proud to be a sponsor.



# Clinch River Float and Fishing Trips



Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries



by Tom Hampton and  
John Jessee

**T**he Clinch River is the crown of the mountain empire in Southwest Virginia. Flowing southwestward from its origin near the town of Tazewell, the Clinch travels some 135 miles, reaching portions of Tazewell, Russell, Wise and Scott counties on its way to the Tennessee state line. In a cast of Virginia rivers that portray history and natural wealth, the Clinch has a story and a character all its own.

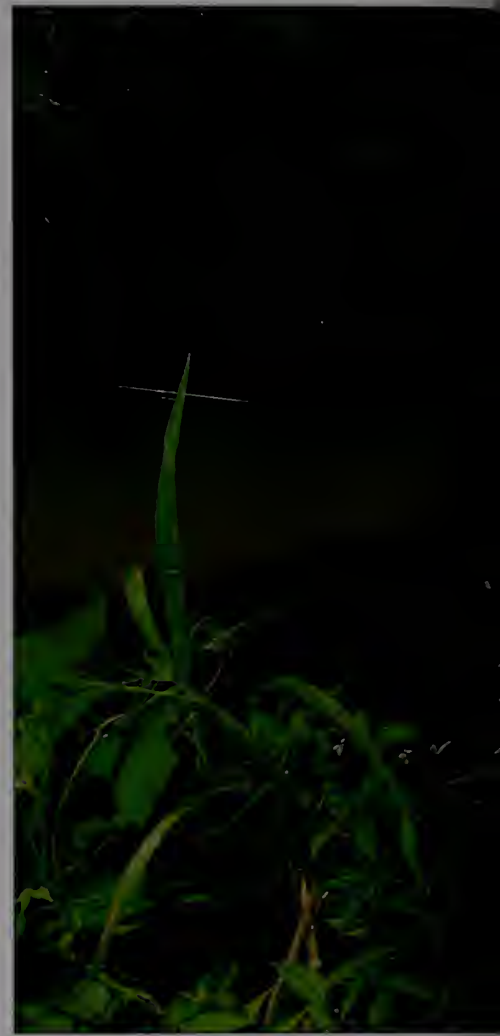
The Clinch River, which was named after an otherwise forgotten explorer, played a major role in the exploration and settlement of Southwest Virginia. Many early settlers made their homes along its eastern shore, while others crossed the formidable flow and explored the wilderness beyond its banks. Probably the most famous explorer to pace the banks of the Clinch and challenge its currents was Daniel Boone. Boone resided for some time near Castlewood, and negotiated the river during his many trips through Southwest Virginia. Today, towns and settlements along its course bear names which are evidence of their historical roles. Places like Blackford, Nash's Ford, Fort Blackmore, and Speer's Ferry are a few examples.

Although the landscapes have changed along the Clinch, the rugged and unique river still remains. The Clinch rolls unimpeded through Virginia, no dams to alter the rhythm of the mighty water. The river does show signs of human alteration, however. To prevent flooding in the town of Saint Paul, the river was re-routed around the town. Observant floaters will note that the present river channel around the south side of Saint Paul was blasted out of solid rock. Two major fish kills have occurred in the last 30 years. These fish kills were the result of toxic spills that originated near Carbo. The river has recovered admirably from the fish kills of

the past, and an incredible diversity of life is now present in and around the river.

The Clinch supports a unique assemblage of aquatic life. The river is home to about 50 species of mussels, which is more than any other river in the world and over 100 species of fish, more than in any other Virginia river. Many of these species are nongame fish—minnows and darters that sport brilliant colors and play a vital role in the survival of other fish and mussel species. But, the variety of sport fish is what makes the Clinch a great destination for anglers.

The Clinch River has a lot to offer those who want to escape the familiar and explore the life of a river. Whether you come to experience the fishing, or just to view the spectacular scenery, please keep safety in mind. Be sure that you are aware of your boat's and your own limitations. Before floating an unfamiliar stretch of river, boaters are advised to use a topographic map to look for ledges and falls. Remember, discretion is the better part of valor. Wear your life jacket, and if you think you might have trouble negotiating a piece of water, portage your boat and equipment around the obstruc-



John Stallard

*The Clinch River is home to about 50 species of mussels—more than any other river in the world—and to 100 species of fish, including some rather impressive game fish like this 40-inch muskie.*

tion. Some of the access points noted on this map are informal sites that have traditionally been used by anglers and floaters. To insure that these sites are available for future use, respect all property. Please refrain from littering, and do not block roads or gates.

## The Fisheries

Many gamefish species which have been stocked into other Virginia rivers are native to the Clinch. Among the native gamefish in the river are the smallmouth bass, spotted bass, walleye, and sauger. In fact, the Clinch and its tributaries are the only Virginia waters where sauger are present. Largemouth bass, rock bass, redbreast sunfish, longear sunfish, and bluegill sunfish are available, as well as musky, black crappie



## Float Trips

### Blackford to Puckett Hole

Distance: 7.3 miles

Gradient: 10.6 ft/mile

The Clinch River is considered navigable in Virginia from the confluence of Indian Creek to the Tennessee state line, but there is no formal access above Blackford. Put in at the Blackford access just upstream of Route 80. This float is through high gradient habitat that should provide excellent smallmouth bass fishing. This section may offer some challenging water, especially during high flows. Take out is on the right side of the river at the Puckett Hole landing off of secondary route 652.

### Puckett Hole to Nash's Ford

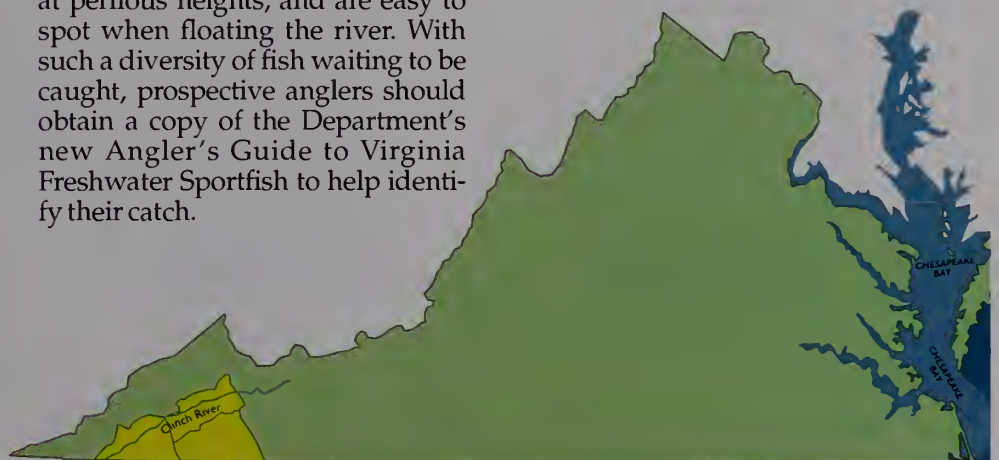
Distance: 9 miles

Gradient: 17.2 ft/mile

Put in at the Puckett Hole landing described above and take out on the left side of the river at the Nash's Ford landing on secondary route 645. This is another good smallmouth bass float. Two notable falls are encountered on this float. The first falls is encountered just downstream of the confluence with Cedar Creek, and the second falls upstream of Nash's Ford. Floaters should plan to portage at both locations.

and freshwater drum. Anglers who are looking for catfish will find both channel and flathead catfish in good numbers and sizes. Striped bass and white bass are sometimes caught in the lower stretches of the river, where they migrate out of Norris Reservoir in Tennessee. Floaters will also notice longnose gar "sunning" near the river's surface and occasionally taking a gulp of air. Strong populations of redhorse suckers and carp are available for anglers with the prowess and inclination to pursue them. Redhorse suckers are most visible in the shallow water near the tails of pools. In Scott County, these shoals are the focal points of a unique spring tradition—the sucker shooting season. From April 15 to May 31 enthusiasts climb to platforms built in trees along the river to

gain a better view of the river. These shooting platforms are often located at perilous heights, and are easy to spot when floating the river. With such a diversity of fish waiting to be caught, prospective anglers should obtain a copy of the Department's new Angler's Guide to Virginia Freshwater Sportfish to help identify their catch.

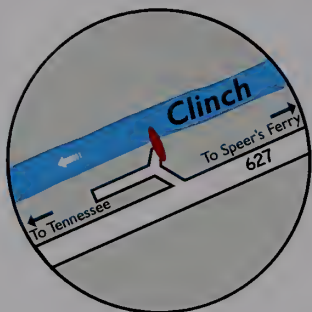


*Remote and beautiful, the Clinch River offers memorable scenery and great opportunities for enjoying a wide diversity of fish. For a copy of the new Angler's Guide to Virginia Freshwater Sportfish, write askalski@dgif.state.va.us or write to Aquatic Education, VDGIF, 4010 West Broad Street, P.O. Box 11104, Richmond, VA 23230-1104. Map graphics by Pels.*

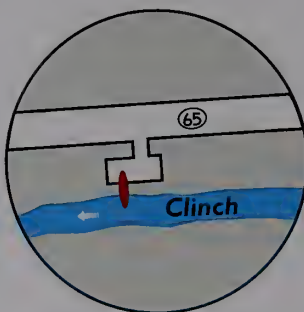
©Dwight Dyke



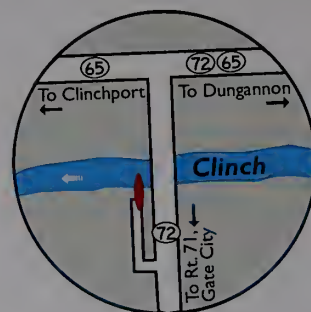
**State Line Access**



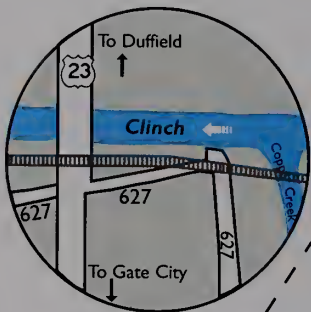
**Clinchport Access**



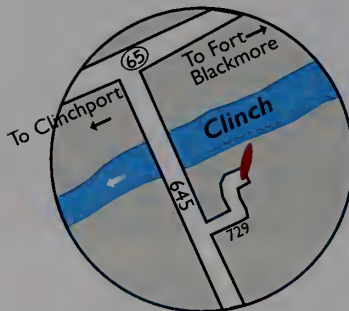
**Fort Blackmore Access**



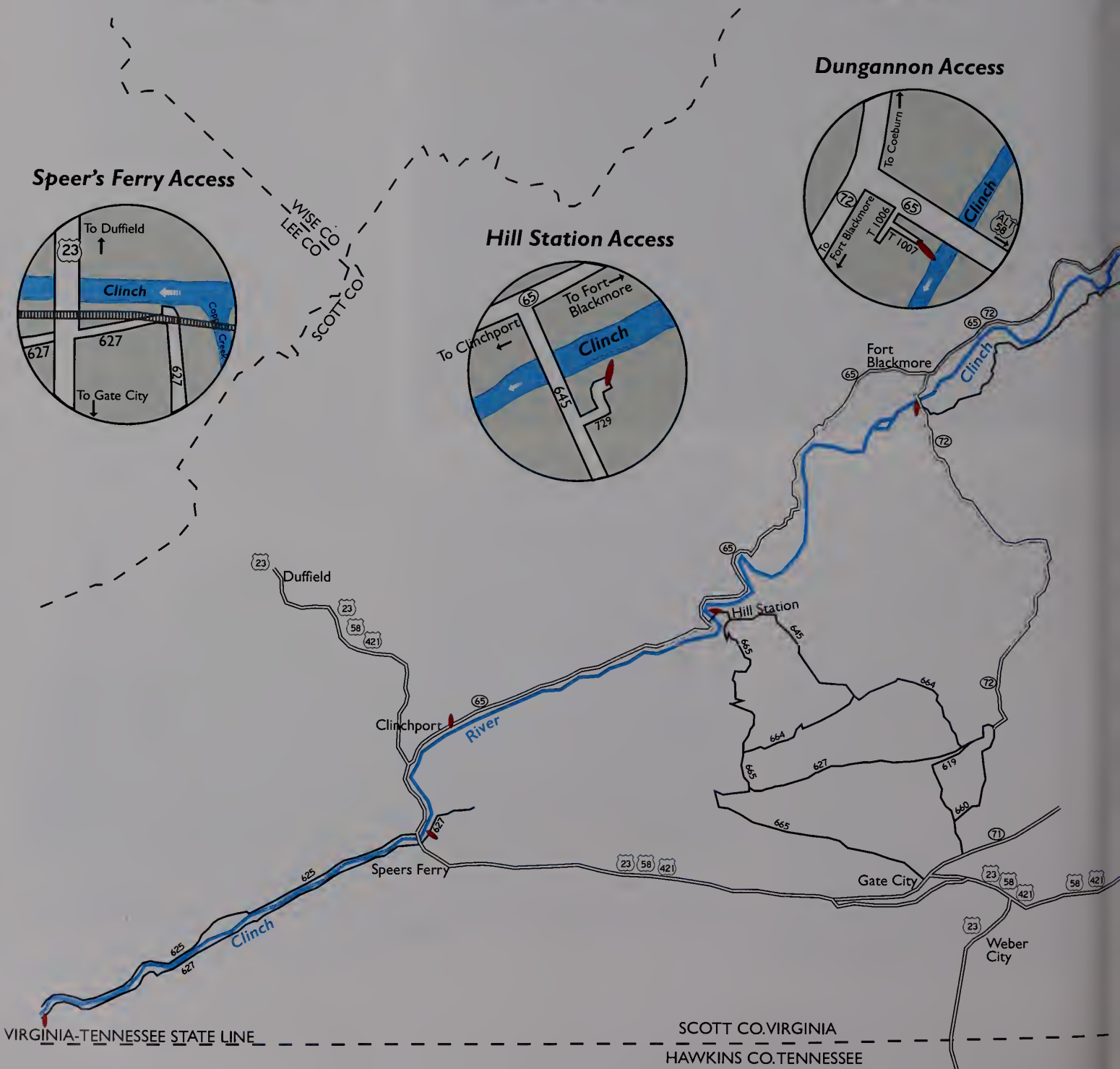
**Speer's Ferry Access**



**Hill Station Access**



**Dungannon Access**

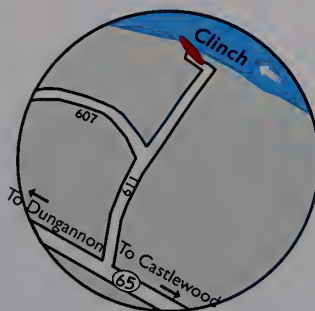




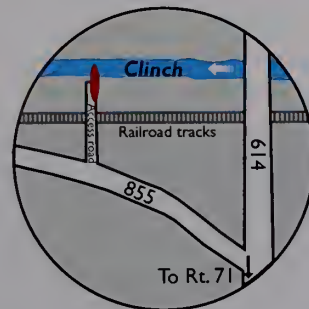


St. 659  
ake out

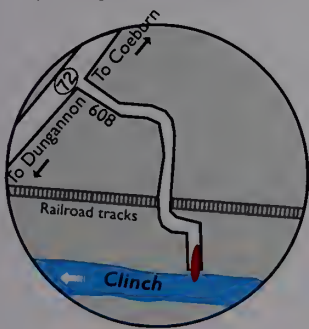
**Burton's Ford Access**



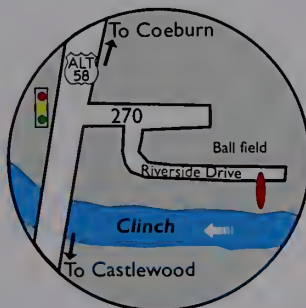
**Carterton Access**



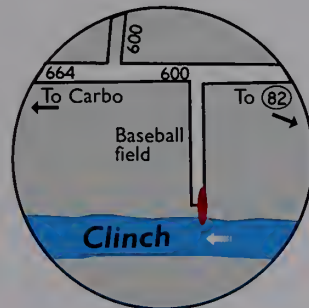
**Miller Yard Access**



**Saint Paul Access**



**Cleveland Access**



Continued on next page.

# Clinch River Float Trips

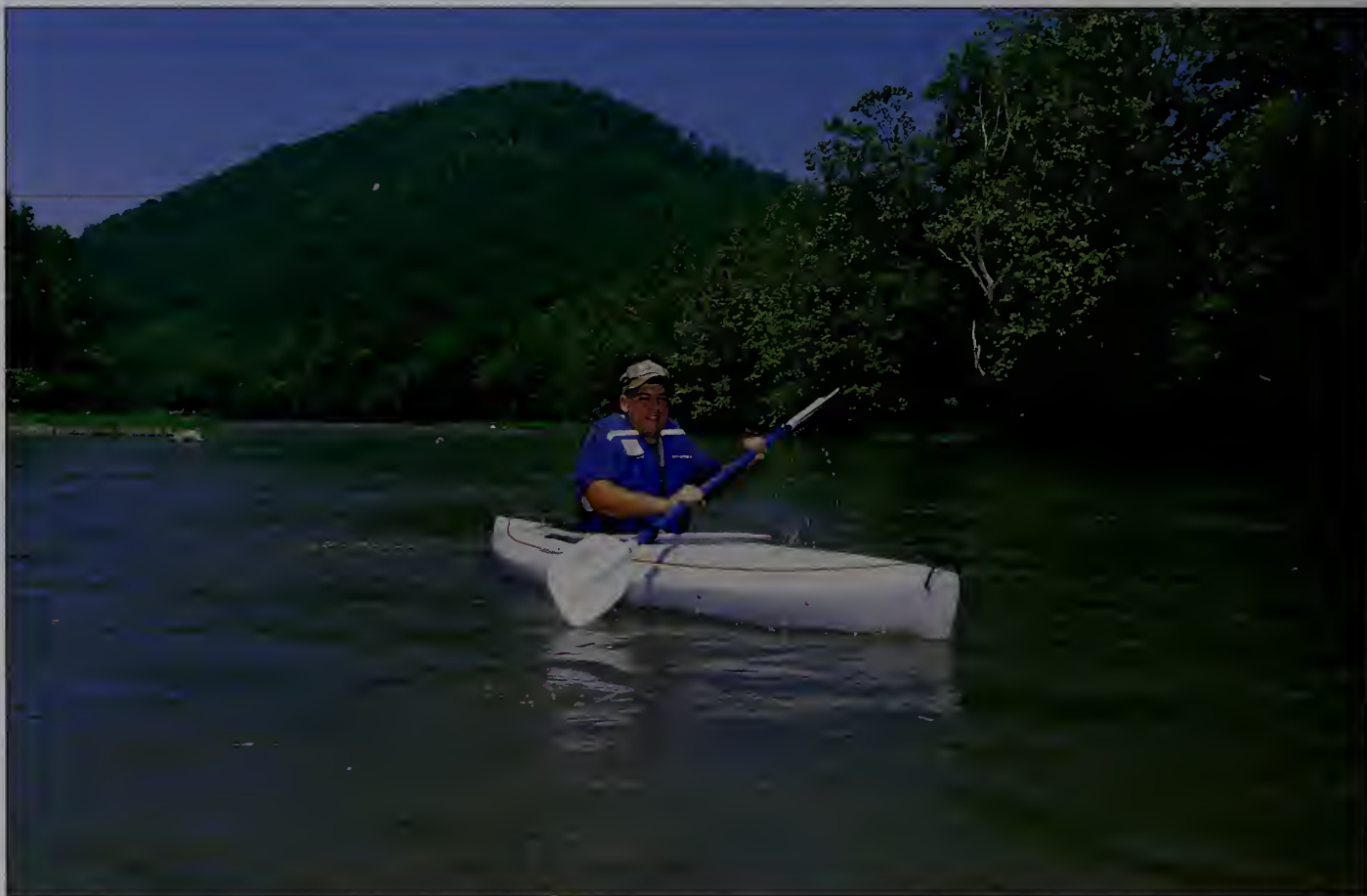
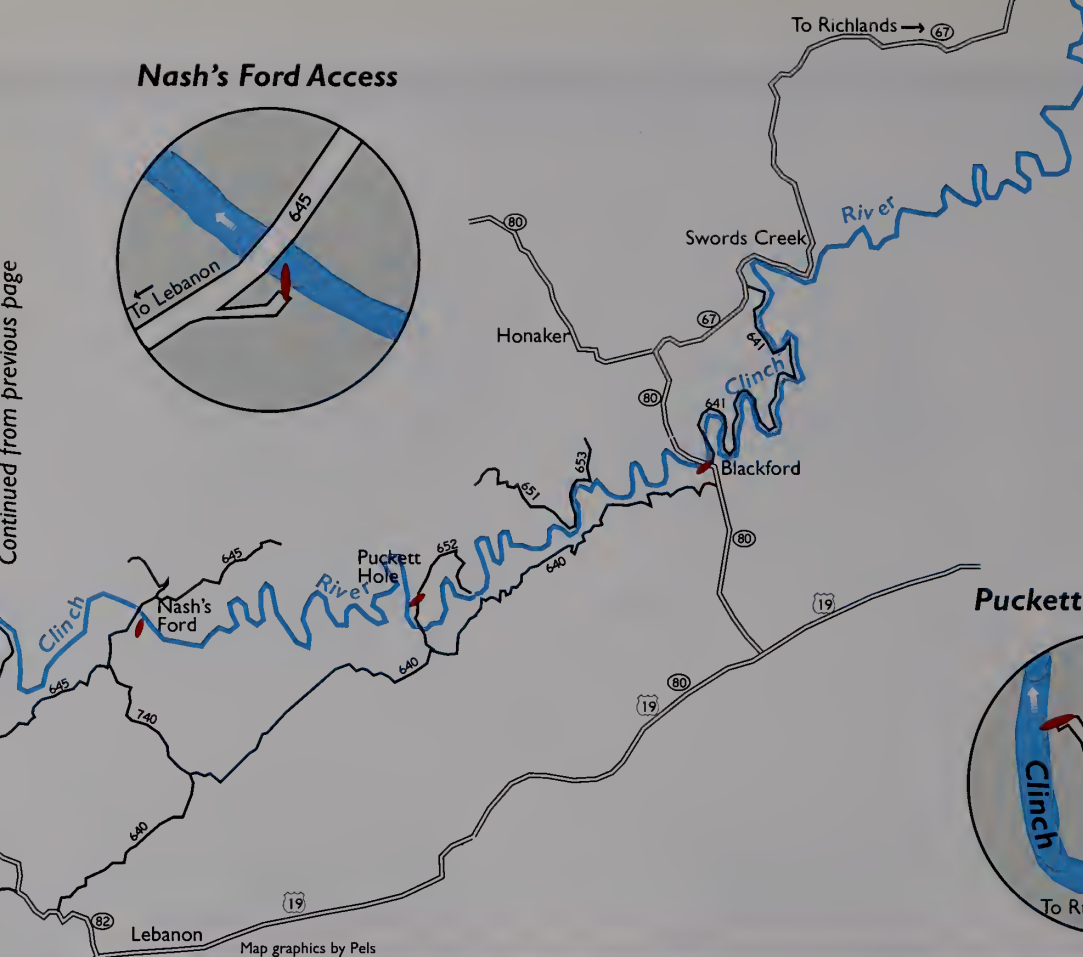
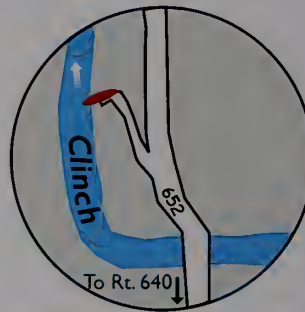
### Nash's Ford Access



### Blackford Access



### Puckett Hole Access





## Nash's Ford to Cleveland

Distance: 8 miles

Gradient: 7.1 ft/mile

This float will bring the floater into different habitat types. Slower pools near Cleveland will hold more sunfish, walleye and musky. Launch at the Nash's Ford access and take out on the right side of the river at the Cleveland access. The Cleveland access is located off of secondary route 600, and is adjacent to the baseball field.

## Cleveland to Carterton

Distance: 7.5 miles

Gradient: 3.0 ft/mile

Put in at the Cleveland access and rig up for flat water fishing. Topwater lures should be effective for bass and sunfish. Numerous deep pools in this reach of river support walleye, musky and catfish. The take-out for this float is on the left side of the river at the Carterton access. To find the Carterton access, take route 614 off of route 640, then take a left onto

route 855 and turn right across the railroad tracks and continue to the river.

## Carterton to Saint Paul

Distance: 8 miles

Gradient: 2.5 ft/mile

This is a good float for anglers looking for a variety of species. Most of this section is flat water, with a few riffles and runs mixed in. Try for bass in the moving water, then rig up for sunfish or walleye in the slower pools. Live minnows, crawdads, or nightcrawlers could provide a good catch of different species. Put in at the Carterton access described above, and take out on the right, just upstream of the town of Saint Paul.

## Saint Paul to Burton's Ford

Distance: 6.2 miles

Gradient: 1.6 ft/mile

Launch at the town of Saint Paul's access on Riverside Drive. This is a good float for bass and sunfish. Small crankbaits and jigs are a good bet for smallmouth bass and sunfish on the first few miles of this float. Fly-fishing with bright colored poppers can be very productive in the shallow flats around Saint Paul. Two notable ledges are encountered on this float. The first ledge is located just downstream of the railroad bridge in Saint Paul. Floaters should portage on the left. The other ledge is located on down the river, and should also be portaged to the left. Walleye fishing is good in this section, particularly in the spring. Take out is on the left side of the river at Burton's Ford. The Burton's Ford site is an informal access that can be located by taking route 65 south out of Castlewood, then bearing right onto route 611 to the river.

## Burton's Ford to Miller's Yard

Distance: 7.1 miles

Gradient: 11.5 ft/mile

Increased gradient in this section makes this float a good one for smallmouth bass. Walleye are often caught below ledges and riffles. Small crankbaits, jigs and grubs are good all-around choices for this type

of water. Launch at Burton's Ford (described above) and take out on the right side of the river at Miller's Yard. There are a couple of ledges and falls in this float that may require you to portage, depending on the water level. Miller's Yard is an informal access located by taking secondary route 608 off of route 72. Follow route 608 under the railroad tracks and to the river. Takeout is just downstream of the swinging bridge.

## Miller's Yard to Dungannon

Distance: 3.7

Gradient: 10 ft/mile

This is a good float when you do not have a lot of time. Put in at the informal access at Miller's Yard. Several good pools and lots of runs and riffles await you downstream. This float has excellent potential for bass and sunfish, and also produces walleye and sauger. Takeout is on the right, just downstream of the Route 65 bridge at Dungannon. If you have all day to float you can extend your float to Route 659 described below.

## Dungannon to Route 659

Distance: Variable

Gradient: 10 ft/mile

The Dungannon access is one of only two concrete boat ramps on the Clinch River. This is a productive float for smallmouth, walleye, sauger, sunfish and catfish. A variety of takeout possibilities exist along route 659, which parallels the river for several miles. Select a site based on the distance you wish to float and available access to the river. It is best to secure permission from the property owner when selecting a take out location.

## Route 659 to Fort Blackmore

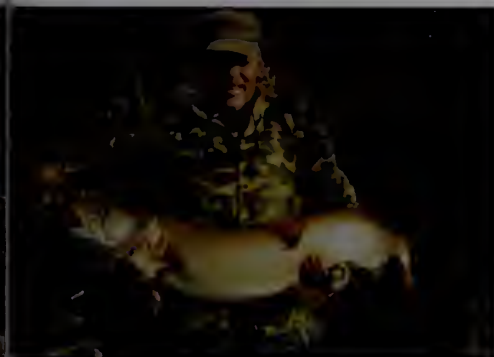
Distance: 8 miles\*

Gradient: 3.1 ft/mile

\* The distance of this float depends on where you launch from route 659, but will be at least 8 miles. This float includes a lot of flat water. The slow and deep pools are good habitat for sunfish, catfish, walleye, and musky. Bring an electric trolling motor for this float, or be prepared to



©Dwight Dyke



John Stallard

*Top: the Clinch River offers exciting rapids as well as fishing.*

*Above: Muskie, like this 50-incher, are known as the fish of 10,000 casts because of how difficult it is to catch them.*

spend some time paddling. This float includes the pool known locally as "the retch"—a pool that stretches almost five miles with an average depth of about 14 feet. Some of the best musky fishing on the Clinch River is found in this float. Striped bass and white bass, migrants from Norris Reservoir in Tennessee, are sometimes caught on this float. Takeout is on the left, at an informal access just downstream of the Route 72 bridge in Fort Blackmore.

#### **Fort Blackmore to Hill Station**

Distance: 7.9 miles  
Gradient: 1.9 ft/ mile

This is one of the most scenic floats on the river. Just downstream of Fort Blackmore lies Pendelton Island. Fishing in this section is good for bass and sunfish, and walleye and sauger are also available. The gradient is low in this section, so floaters should allow plenty of daylight time to reach Hill Station. Take-

out is on the left side of the river, just upstream of the route 645 bridge. The Hill Station access can be found off of route 645 on the southeast side of the river.

#### **Hill Station to Clinchport**

Distance: 5.2 miles  
Gradient: 2.0 ft/mile

Put in at the Hill Station access described above. This section is typical of the lower river. Lazy pools provide good fishing for sunfish and catfish, while faster water at the scattered riffles offers smallmouth bass fishing. Take out on the right side of the river at the Clinchport access.

#### **Clinchport to Speer's Ferry**

Distance: 2 miles  
Gradient: 3.2 ft/mile

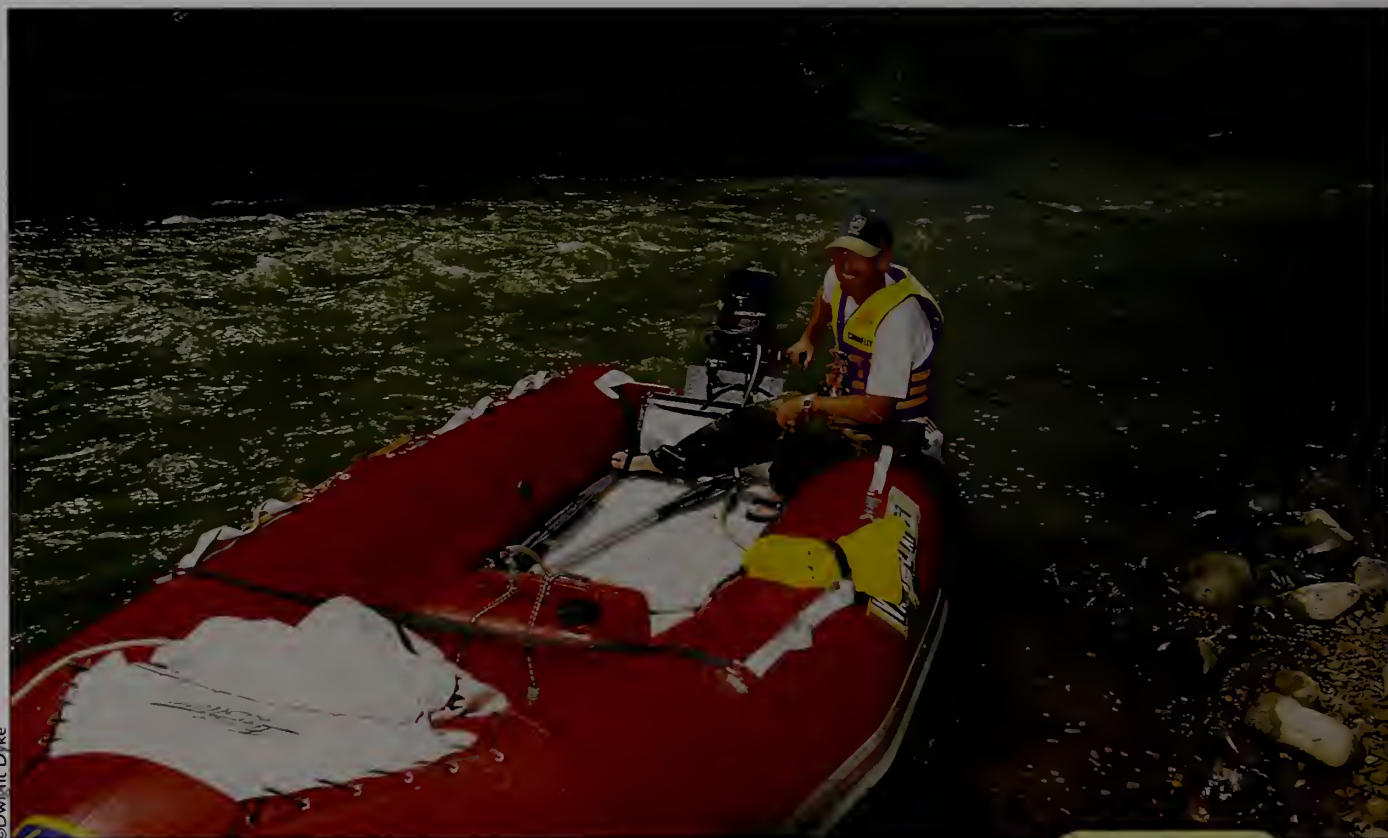
A good variety of habitats are encountered on this short float, and many species can be caught. Launch at the Clinchport ramp and tie on a small, deep-diving crankbait. The

first section of this float will offer some good bass and sunfish water, while ledges in the last stretch will harbor walleye and sauger. Take out on the left side of the river at Speer's Ferry. An informal access is located near the railroad bridge off of route 627.

#### **Speer's Ferry to State Line**

Distance: 9 miles  
Gradient: 2.5 ft/mile

This float will take anglers through some beautiful scenery on the way to the Virginia-Tennessee border. Most of this float is through slow moving water, so allow ample time to cover the distance between access points. The scattered shoals in this section are popular during the spring sucker shooting season. Be sure to notice the platforms placed high among the sycamores. Take out is on the left side of the river at the State Line access, off of route 627. □



*Lt. Bill Rose in Zodiac raft on the Clinch.*







©Tim Black

# MY GREATEST DEER HUNT

by Mike Roberts

*Editor's note: This is a true story. It occurred on December 2, 1972 in the mountains of Amherst County, Virginia. According to the author, the exact location is known only to those who shared the experience.*

**T**wenty-seven consecutive seasons of pursuing white-tailed deer in Virginia have given me a bumper crop of frosty-morning memories. During rare times when my mind is free of life's everyday dilemmas, my thoughts ease along the well-trodden trails of autumns past. Like the stars on a cold, clear winter's night, there is always one memory that shines brighter than the rest. It's the recollection of my greatest deer hunt and the images of that hunt are still as vivid as if it happened only yesterday.

I recall sitting at the base of a large red oak, which time and the wind had fashioned to comfortably accommodate my back. On the adjacent ridge lay a runway etched deeply into the rich soil by deer traveling to and from the tangled thickets of laurel and rhododendron. In the stillness of the evening I listened intently for the rhythmic rustle of hooves moving through dry leaves, but heard only silence.

All too soon the sun sank below the blue mountain tops and a somber curtain of dusk was drawn ever so tightly. Majestic stands of hickory and beech stood silhouetted against the fading hues of a western sky. Then, from some distant hardwood cove, a great horned owl resoundingly echoed an end to the day, and yet another hunting season. Standing, I cleared the chamber of a rifle that had remained silent during the previous two weeks. I had greatly anticipated this hunting season, but something occurred on

this day that made my apparent lack of success seem trivial.

Time passes differently when you're in the field, and an eternity had passed since making the early morning drive to the home of Phil Davis, my best friend and hunting companion. Rounding the final curve, I saw a dimly lit bedroom and knew that at least his alarm clock was working. During deer season, Phil's was the single residence in that subdivision which revealed life at 4 a.m. On this particular morning, however, light sparkled from almost every room in a house across the street.

That house belonged to Harold Lanter, Phil's relatively new neighbor. Harold, too, was fond of the outdoors, but for all practical purposes, cancer had ended his hunting and fishing days. This young man was a scrapper who believed that his fight with Hodgkin's disease would end in total recovery. Unexplainably, the cancerous cells would spread like wildfire, then vanish without a trace, then recur full-forced. Frequent operations and radiation treatments had helped in the short term, but the misery of it all had overtaken him.

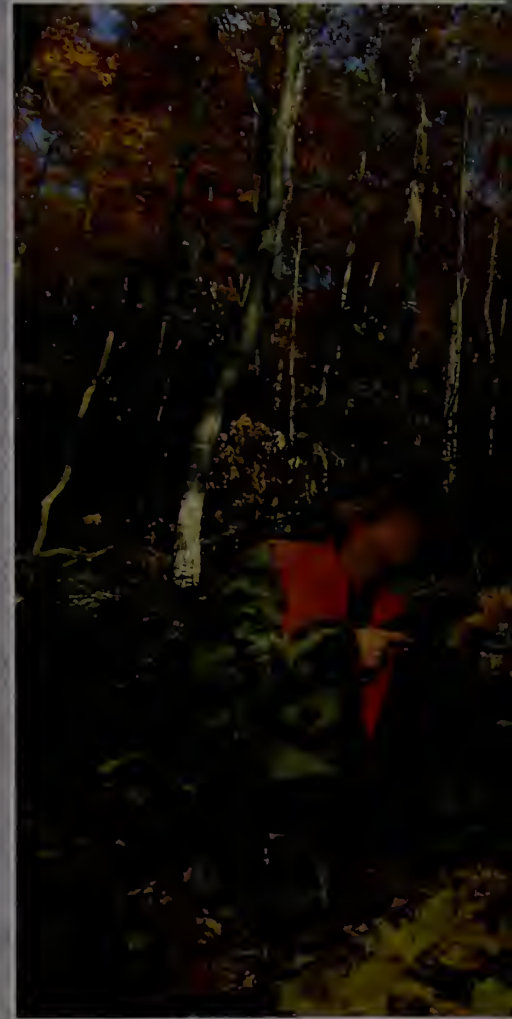
But that day was my day for a big hunt, and Harold's plight was not utmost on my mind. Today was the last Saturday of deer season and my final chance for fresh venison.

Just as I parked, the front porch light came on and out walked Phil. This was unusual because there was always time for a short nap while waiting for him to finish his deliberate preparation. Smiling, Phil said "Good morning," but his voice telegraphed a hint of unexpected seriousness. "Roberts, do you mind if Harold goes huntin' with us today?"

What? Had I heard my friend correctly? Was there an objection to taking a stranger to the one place we did not share with anyone?

"No, that's fine with me," I replied. Sensing serious hesitation, Phil apologetically explained the circumstances.

The doctors said Harold's condition was worsening. The doctor pre-



*A few yards off the road, Harold found a tree to lean against to ease the ever-increasing pain in his back. The sun had driven most of the deer from their bedding areas, but the vantage point still held promise.*

scribed a new drug to help relieve the persistent pain of a growing spinal tumor. Short of a miracle, Harold's life was nearing its end.

Knowing his love for the hunt, Harold's personal doctor had suggested that if he ever wanted to hunt deer again, do it now. Out of desperation, Harold's wife, Susan, had asked Phil if her husband might possibly accompany us hunting the following morning.

There was only one response to such an appeal, so we prepared to take Harold on the hunt.

Even in failing health Harold was ready to go at that early hour.





©Dwight Dyke

Harold double-checked a clear plastic bag to be sure that his conglomeration of pills was properly secured.

As in many cases, getting there was half the fun. Riding along, we swapped stories about big bucks, finicky trout, and wonderful, wild places. Phil spun a tale of being hopelessly entangled in briars, with only a bow, when two enormous black bears wandered by at point-blank range. At the end of that story, our hysterical laughter drowned out even the motor noise. Practically crying and holding his aching back, Harold begged us not to make him laugh that hard again. It was difficult to remember that Harold was any different from me or Phil.

Hardly before realizing how far we had traveled, the pavement of the main highway changed to gravel. The narrow road twisted along-

side fields sparkling with frost and the occasional green reflection of deer eyes. Several miles further, Phil began braking and slowly turned onto a familiar logging road.

The first mile was four-wheel drive tough and in the bouncing our belly laughing stopped. Coursing through a gauntlet of tight switchbacks, Phil focused on avoiding jagged rocks jutting up from the eroded tracks. Farther along, the prayer of a road crossed a trickling stream with steep, muddy banks. Accelerating, Phil yelled "Hold on," and we bounced, unscathed, to the other side.

For the next several hundred yards, the going was somewhat smoother. Then, we stopped abruptly at the end of a rickety, old bridge. A forest service crew had built the structure, high above the rocks and

water, for transporting timber from the region. Covered with moss and lichens, its stability was now questionable. Phil meticulously aligned the jeep's front tires with the two gigantic logs and snail-paced forward. Not one of us dared look down into the pitch-black gorge. Upon feeling all four tires grip the earthen road, we breathed a genuine sigh of relief. Thankfully, for Harold's sake, the roughest portion of our journey had been completed.

Continuing on, we came to an extensive clear-cut. Phil pulled to the edge and turned off the ignition. Except for a hot muffler popping and cracking, all was quiet. Beyond the logged area loomed a seemingly endless mature forest. Phil and I considered this place to be ours, and, in a way, it was. The mountain was home to heavy-bodied bucks with wide racks and keen-eyed gobblers sporting long, thick beards. On occasion, a wayfaring bear added a pinch of spice to this rich autumn recipe.

Knowing that our guest had never taken a buck, Phil and I offered the use of our treestands. Harold graciously declined, saying he would stay in the vehicle until break of day.

Phil and I agreed to meet back at the vehicle for lunch. Even without communicating, Phil and I knew how the other would spend the hours of this final morning. Patience would keep him glued to a weather-worn seat high in a tree, while relentless desire to cover ground would force me down before 9 a.m. Aided by a flashlight, I walked briskly toward an abandoned home place, thinking about Harold sitting in the vehicle.

Dawn was a faint glow in the east when I arrived at a mammoth-sized white oak. I climbed up some thirty feet to a pair of gnarled limbs and got situated for the morning vigil.

As if in some wretchedly cursed land, I could see the towering chestnut sentinels had fallen prey to an invisible army of deadly spores. Below, a crumbling, clay-brick fireplace stirred my imagination. I visualized a loving family struggling to



survive the overwhelming odds of poor soil and the Great Depression. Nevertheless, through times good and bad, cheerful children played games in the cool shade of the very tree in which I sat. How had this monarch escaped the wrath of a singing saw-blade?

Suddenly a dry twig snapped an end to my daydream. Two deer were cantering across the periwinkle-covered hollow. Instantly, my rifle was up, but the scope revealed a doe and her June fawn. Wisps of steam drifted from their twitching nostrils as they stopped and nervously sniffed the crisp air for danger. Watching them melt into thick cover, I could only wonder if a buck had slipped by unnoticed.

Time passed. Fidgety gray squirrels scampered about in search of acorns covered weeks earlier by the annual blanket of fallen leaves. A female downy woodpecker persistently drilled for beetle larvae hidden beneath the bark of a rotting limb overhead. Chickadees fluttered through the branches, investigating each brown, curled leaf for hibernating spiders and caterpillars. The sun moved ever higher in the sky, and my battle against impatience ended in defeat. Outdone, I descended to the ground.

Leaving the tree, a swift pace carried me along a heavily timbered ridge crest. Freshly pawed scrapes and scarred white pine saplings indicated that the rut was in full swing. Nearing the point of the ridge, I slowed my stride, but too late. A flash of white and glimpse of gleaming antlers signaled a buck fleeing for his life. Crashing away through the laurel, he was out of sight before I could shoulder my Remington.

Near the edge of the cliff, an oval depression in the leaves revealed the spot where the bedded buck had a perfect view of approaching predators, as well as that all important escape route. I felt no shame in having been outwitted by an animal more acutely sensed than one that spends each day locked in a windowless office. There would be another day for that one.

Looping back to the old logging road, I heard a coarse-mouthed hound giving chase to a deer near the top of the mountain. The anticipated roaring shot never came. In fact, not one round had been fired on the mountain during the entire morning. Thoughts of a brown bag filled with sandwiches, oatmeal cookies, and coke turned my feet toward the jeep.

Except for flushing a single ruffed grouse, the return hike was uneventful. At the jeep, neither Phil nor Harold was anywhere to be seen. I had not expected Phil to be back, but where was Harold? His unzipped rifle case lay empty on the seat. He

*The regal whitetail drifted silently into view. Partially obscured from Harold's view, the deer stopped and looked over to where Harold sat, shaking from anticipation. Slowly he raised his rifle, hoping the buck would not sense him ...*

was doing what he came to do, trying to savor the last few minutes of what would probably be his final hunt.

As I was the first back to the jeep, I took a much needed nap. Leaning the .270 against a nearby pine, I removed my camouflage jacket, folded it neatly into a pillow, and, like an old dog, made a bed in the dry grass. Although cognizant of the world around me, I slipped into a peaceful slumber.

©Scotty Lovett





At some point, a covey of quail scratched and fed within a few yards of where I lay. Unusual for the mountains, we had seen these birds several times while hunting the second-growth. Now, their muffled feeding notes aroused reminiscence of my youth and simpler, carefree times. As a foot-loose farm boy, I had taken pride in mimicking wildlife, especially the bobwhite.

My imitation calls came as soft and sweet as if from the real McCoy and drew a reply. Eventually, the demand for weed seeds took precedence over small talk and they continued on their way. I fell asleep again.

Then a rifle blast shattered the air. A few yards in front of the jeep something milled about in the underbrush. A shiver of horror went up my spine. Harold! Had another hunter mistaken him for a deer? Had he accidentally shot himself? Had he taken his own life?

I raced to the edge of the road and shouted. There was no response. Then Harold stumbled from the trees, mumbling and slinging his .30-.30 from side to side. Tripping over a fallen branch, he plunged headlong into the honeysuckle, but was up quickly, heading away. I hurried down the embankment after him.

I saw the hammer on his lever-action Marlin was cocked. Approaching from behind, I grabbed Harold's arm and the rifle simultaneously. He hadn't seen me and he looked bewildered.

Holding his rifle, I ejected the bullet and loudly asked, "What in the world is going on, Harold?" Without uttering a word, he threw his arms around me and began to cry, then laugh, and then jump about. Surely, this man had gone insane! With one arm still around my neck, Harold pointed across the ravine. There, lying stone dead, was a whitetail buck with the most magnificent set of antlers I had ever seen. Like two boys on Christmas morning, we hooted and hollered, danced around, and hollered some more.

After the short celebration, we walked toward the downed deer. Though bubbling with delight, Harold never spoke a word the final 40 yards. Nearing the buck, he feebly knelt and stroked its warm, rut-swelled neck. As tears flowed freely down both cheeks, Harold bowed his head and, among that living chapel of trees, prayed aloud.

Quivering with excitement, Harold gave thanks to God for life and allowing him to live one more day. I stood in reverence as he openly affirmed his faith in a source more powerful than any disease or death. This was no white-shirt, satin-tie prayer, but a heart-to-heart talk with a trusted friend.

Finishing, Harold turned and looked up at me. With his dark eyes staring directly into mine, he began to speak. "Mike, if there is anything in your life that you wish to accomplish, do it while you have the health and strength to enjoy it. Look at me and realize that there is no promise of tomorrow; live each day to the fullest." In that overwhelming moment I gave no reply for there was none to give.

When Phil came to investigate he saw me standing over Harold, rifle in hand. His first thought was of tragedy, but seconds later he spotted the buck and realized there was no crisis but jubilation.

I waved and yelled, and in a few



minutes Phil stood beside us and his glowing smile mirrored Harold's joy. Leaning over and grasping an antler, Phil gently lifted the buck's head. Only then did we realize just how impressive the rack really was. Massive beams supported a brushpile of long and unusual tines. It was a sixteen-pointer, the whitetail of a lifetime.

You would have never known it was Harold's first buck by the way he recounted his morning for us. He spoke like a veteran woodsman.

While waiting in the jeep for daybreak, Harold decided that still hunting along the access road was his best option. As the first gray light unveiled the surrounding forest, he set out along the wooded corridor. The pungent odor of wet, decaying leaves reinforced how much autumn and hunting meant to him. His hope for a buck was fueled by abundant, fresh hoofprints pressed deeply into the road.

Completely mesmerized by the woodland solitude, Harold all but forgot time. After a while, though, even the stop-and-go gait took its toll on his legs. Without having seen one deer, he turned back. Hopefully, the ridge where the jeep was parked would provide a decent lookout until the others returned for lunch.

Harold finally reached the jeep and started searching for a place to relax. A few yards off the road he found a leaning hemlock upon which to rest his throbbing back. From there, a natural lane exposed a honeysuckle choked clearing, some 75 yards downhill and across a small stream. The sun had likely driven most of the deer to their bedding areas. Still, the view was promising.

Time passed and the woods remained still. Then something from the opposite ridge attracted Harold's attention. For the longest time nothing moved. Had he wanted to see a deer so badly that his mind was now playing tricks? Without warning, the regal whitetail appeared, drifting silently, almost ghost-like through the trees.

Partially obscured, the deer stopped and looked over to where Harold sat shaking like a leaf in a

March wind. Thinking that the buck would see him sitting there, he cautiously reached up and slowly pulled one of the overhanging hemlock limbs down to conceal himself. As luck would have it, the limb slipped from his hand and waved wildly up and down like an enormous green flag. The rut-crazed buck watched for a while, but nonchalantly put its nose to the ground and headed for the clearing. Hands still trembling, Harold's grip tightened on the carbine lying across his lap.

As if things were not bad enough, someone was now at the jeep—



*"If there is anything in your life that you wish to accomplish, do it while you have the health and strength to enjoy it ... there is no promise of tomorrow; live each day to the fullest." —Harold Lanter*

whistling loudly like a quail. Predictably, the buck paused and turned his head in the direction of the shrill sound. Harold prayed for the noise to stop, and sure enough, the whistles ceased.

Finally, the buck stepped into the opening and stopped broadside. Harold raised the rifle and desperately attempted to hold it steady, but the scope magnified his nervous tension. Knowing it was now or never, he aimed. When the crosshairs drifted across the deer's shoulder, Harold pulled the trigger. The huge whitetail fell lifeless.

Momentarily, Harold sat hypnotized at what had taken place. Still in shock, he struggled to his feet and staggered toward the prize, talking to himself all the way. Then, someone touched his arm.

Most people would agree that Harold was plain lucky in taking that buck. The fact that he unknowingly sat down within sight of a fresh scrape may have been luck; my timely nap might have been, also. Even the killing shot could have been Lady Luck's smile of fortune. However, I believe some power other than luck may have been at work.

Later that afternoon, another hunter walked by and saw Harold's deer lying in the back of the jeep. Stopping to chat, the white-bearded gentleman told Phil about being on top of the mountain earlier in the day when a hound chased an unbelievable buck well within range. Said he wanted to see how it felt to pass up a trophy deer. Standing there shaking his head at the mass of antlers, the man vowed it was the same buck, and wondered how on earth he could have done such a thing. Personally, I think the hunter had a bit of help with that decision—someone's prayer was in the process of being answered.

Almost three years later, Harold Lanter lost the long and courageous battle against cancer. On a cool October day, family and friends gathered with heavy hearts in a Galax cemetery to pay their final respects. The Blue Ridge Mountains seemed an appropriate memorial for this man's love and appreciation of the great outdoors. Harold was remembered for faith during suffering, love shared, and songs sung. Long passed from this life into one better, he remains very much alive in the hearts of all who knew him.

And with the waning hours of each season's end I remember Harold and I think about what was perhaps the greatest deer hunt of all times. □

*Mike Roberts is an outdoor writer and photographer from Lynchburg. He was encouraged for years by his hunting companions to publish this story, so he finally submitted it to Virginia Wildlife.*





# Journal

1

*Left, #1: Taylor Ellke's glow of excitement landed him first place in the Kids-n-Fishing Photo Contest. Taylor is from Amelia.*

*Below, #2: Ashley Lutto of Richmond smiled her way to second place as she landed a largemouth.*

## "Kids -n- Fishing" Photos make you want to take a child fishing

During this year's National Fishing Week, June 2-8, the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries and Richmond Camera sponsored a photo contest that would capture the excitement of children fishing. The only contest rule was that photographed children be between the ages of five and 12. Winning shots would best capture the theme "kids enjoying fishing." Picking the "best" of the 144 entries was almost impossible, but these three were ultimately declared the winners.

Fishing is one of the most fulfilling things you can do with children, and if you haven't taken a youngster fishing yet this year, September and October can be great fishing months. If you're not convinced already that it's time to turn off the television and take a kid fishing, look at these photos. □

*Right, #3: The giggles that came from the photo of Amy Anthony, of Powhatan, captured the hearts of the judges for a third place award.*

*VDGIF awarded a Beginning Angler Education Kit to the three winners along with a rod and reel to first and second place. In addition, a \$100 savings bond was given to Taylor Ellke, by Richmond Camera, for capturing first place.*

## Watchable Wildlife Conference

Travel to the heart of the Blue Ridge Mountains of Southwest Virginia on November 11-15 to the Hotel Roanoke and Conference Center in Roanoke, Virginia. The theme of this year's Watchable Wildlife Conference is "Expanding Horizons: A Diversity of Views...A Diversity of Viewers." Pre-conference workshops include developing visitor surveys, designing web sites, landscaping for wildlife, marketing and implementing programs, and wildlife festivals.

3

Pre- and post-conference field trips include tours to wetland/wildlife habitat, parks, and the world-famous Appalachian Trail. Plenary and technical sessions are held November 12-14 and each day has a different theme—Diversity of Views and Views, Balancing Economics and Ecology, and From Wildlife to Wild Life. Keynote speakers are Deputy

Secretary of the Interior, John Garamendi (invited), Joan Embery (national celebrity and goodwill ambassador for the San Diego Zoo,, and Chris Palmer (president of National Wildlife Productions).

For more information, contact Barbara Falls, 820 University City Boulevard, Mail Code 0364, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, Virginia 24061, phone: (540) 231-3122, or email: bfalls@vt.edu. □

For more information on watchable wildlife write for your very own "A Guide to Virginia Wildlife Management Areas." Send \$5 shipping and handling to V.I.B., P.O. Box 27563, Richmond, VA 23261. Or, for no charge, you may obtain a copy at our regional offices or the main office in Richmond. Be sure to ask for "A Guide to Virginia Wildlife Management Areas."

For information about Virginia's Nongame Program, contact Ray Fernald, the Nongame Program, Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, 4010 West Broad St., P.O. Box 11104, Richmond, VA 23230-1104.

### PBS to Air *Virginia's Eastern Shore* *"A Bird's Eye View"*

The first in a series of outdoor travel/adventure shows produced by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries will air on PBS in Virginia on Sunday, September 28 at 5 p.m.

Featuring the excitement of the Annual Eastern Shore Birding Festival, The 30-minute show takes you on an exciting trip to one of Virginia's very special places. The Department's cameras explore this surprisingly untouched paradise and come up with some unusual activities, like world class sculptors creating wildlife in bronze. But most of all the viewer will see some of Virginia's most spectacular Wildlife; including one of the largest bird migrations anywhere in the world.

Watch this show on your local PBS station: WBRA-15, Roanoke; WCVE-23, Richmond; WVPT-51, Harrisonburg; WNVC-56 Richmond; WSBN-47, Norton and WMSY-52, Marion.

## Fifth Annual Eastern Shore Birding Festival October 3, 4, & 5 1997

The warm golden-orange glow of Indian summer days and cool, crispy nights, October a great month. But another reason is the joy of witnessing the spell-binding aerial rapture and hearing the unchained melodies of neotropicals, raptors and other migratory birds as they pass over the Atlantic

Commencing this year's celebration is a delectable seafood dinner on Friday evening followed by a special program at Sunset Beach Inn, headquarters for the ESBF. The guest speaker is renowned birder Peter Dunne, Director of Natural Historical Information at New Jersey's Cape May Bird Observatory.



Flyway of Virginia's Eastern Shore.

Thousands of these birds stage at the funneled tip of the Delmarva Peninsula in early autumn to rest, feed or wait out a storm. In due course, these celestial navigators will cover many miles south enroute to wintering in a milder climate. For the Virginia coast, an internationally-named Biosphere Reserve, October is the peak of fall migration, a seasonal farewell to numerous avian species.

To get your own look at this phenomenon consider the fifth annual Eastern Shore Birding Festival (ESBF) which will be held October 3-5, rain or shine. New and seasoned birders are invited to join the festivities.

Mr. Dunne is also the author of several books including, *The Wind Masters: The Lives of North American Birds of Prey*.

Nearly 20 guided/solo hikes will be available on Saturday and Sunday. From idyllic Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge to the surprisingly diverse Eastern Shore National Wildlife Refuge, you can view birds in an impressive array of natural habitats. Of significant interest to many participants is the opportunity to tour several local farms. If you are an ESBF veteran, check the agenda for new sites this year.

Perhaps you would savor a guided canoe exploration of the wondrous tidal marshes or an unforgettable trek on the unspoiled barrier is-



land called Fisherman's. At some point you may prefer a solitary moment at Saxis Wildlife Management Area, a Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries-owned and managed bayside sanctuary.

Visitors are amazed by close-up observations of various avifauna at the Banding Station near the entrance of Kiptopeke State Park. From the Hawk Observatory onlookers can spot eagles, falcons and other raptors as they soar gracefully across the firmament.

Choose from about 20 different nature workshops and guest speakers at scheduled times during the weekend. Meanwhile numerous exhibits featuring local wildlife artists and craftworkers are displayed outside at the Sunset Beach Inn. Kick back during evenings and attend the restaurant speaker series.

Upon arrival at the ESBF, be certain to check at the registration desk for updated schedule adjustments. Rise and shine Saturday and Sunday so you won't miss the early morning migrants. Consult your itinerary to determine the time and place where you need to be. Buses shuttle participants at set times to designated locations.

Seize the moment in early September and contact The Eastern Shore of Virginia Chamber of Commerce, P.O. Drawer 460, Melfa, Virginia 23410 for your pre-registration packet. Programs are allotted on a first come, first served basis. Select an alternate activity in case certain tours have been filled.

Be prepared with a reliable pair of binoculars/spotting scope, camera, bird identification book, all-weather apparel, insect repellent and your festival pass. Have a safe, memorable trip. We hope to see you there!

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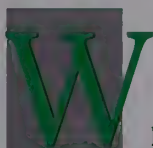
*Emily Grey is an attorney and also a freelance writer and photographer living on the Eastern Shore.*

For further information, contact the Eastern Shore of Virginia Chamber of Commerce  
P.O. Drawer 460  
Melfa, Virginia 23410  
or call (757) 787-2460

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## Tickseed Sunflowers

In September, even when skies are gray there's a flower blooming in the wild that makes the days seem bright. It's called the tickseed sunflower and it's so prolific in some moist fields and roadside ditches that it must increase the wattage of ambient light in the neighborhood.

Although lots of people want to confuse this wildflower with coreopsis, this yellow daisy-like flower is a member of the genus called *Bidens*. *Bidens* are annuals, blooming, setting seed, and dying all in a single year, but because their seeds usually fall where they grow, they keep coming back year after year. The showy one we call tickseed sunflower is *Bidens polylepis*, a native species that can grow 4 to 6 feet tall but is often kept shorter by roadside mowing.

One of the distinguishing features of the *Bidens* clan is their seeds (akenes), and you may be more familiar with these seeds than you think. *Bidens* is Latin for two-toothed, and the name refers to two pronged appendages that jut out from the top of many *Bidens* seeds. Check out your pants leg after a September meadow walk and you may find a fine collection of *Bidens* seeds. Some, like Spanish needles (*Bidens bipinnata*), are narrow and straight, with four sharp barbs on the end; they appear atop the plant's stems in familiar star-like clusters. Others, like the seeds of *Bidens frondosa*, are more shield-shaped and have the typical two prongs at the end. Hitchhikers, beggar ticks, beggar lice, sticktight, and pitchforks are common names we attach to these freeloading seeds. Not only do these seeds ride on the clothing of people, they ride on the fur of animals—a nifty way these plants have devised to disperse their seeds.

What's interesting, however, is that some of the most troublesome

*Bidens* seeds come from the plants with the least conspicuous flowers. *Bidens bipinnata* and *Bidens frondosa*, for example, have inconspicuous flowers; they look like daisies that have had all their outer petals picked off. What they have instead are yellow centers (disk flowers) surrounded by leafy green bracts. *Bidens polylepis*, on the other hand, has the conspicuous yellow flowers we call tickseed sunflowers, but its seeds are relatively benign when it comes to how grasping they are. All the *Bidens* seeds are consumed to

from wild plants. (Be sure to get permission from the landowner and to harvest only from a few plants in well-established colonies.) According to wildflower expert Harry Phillips, tickseed sunflower seeds are mature and ready for collection after the first or second October frost. After that, he says, the seed head deteriorates quickly, so if you want to be sure to get some, he suggests harvesting the seeds before they are fully mature. According to Phillips, seeds harvested when they're dark green will ripen (turn



©Nancy Hugo

some extent by wildlife, with songbirds, wood ducks, pheasant, and quail listed as notable beneficiaries.

So if you have tickseed sunflowers blooming in your meadows or roadside ditches, by all means let them be. It saddens me to see stretches of road where the tickseed sunflowers have been mowed away by overzealous landowners. You can also add tickseed sunflowers to man-made wildflower meadows or wildlife gardens by collecting seeds

brown) on the cut plant in a few days. Collect stems with seed heads on them, let them air dry several days, then beat them into a paper bag to remove the seeds. Plant the seeds in the fall in moist soil and full sun to open shade.

In one yard in my hometown, a drift of tickseed sunflowers planted in just this way transformed a monoculture of grass into a meadow-like edge that's as beautiful as it is beneficial to wildlife. □



# Recipes

By Joan Cone

## Preserve Quail Offer Good Eating

**D**ue to the declining bobwhite population, many of us must hunt quail on preserves. This disappearance of quail, which had been so plentiful in Virginia, has taken place in all southern states.

The bright side is that our hunting dogs find more quail in a day's preserve hunt than they would in the wild. As a result, more birds will be available for us eager cooks for use in a variety of recipes.

### Menu

*Zesty Guacamole*

*Virginia Fried Quail*

*Carrots Almondine*

*Spinach Salad With Pears and Blue Cheese*

*Banana Cake With Raspberry Glaze*

### Zesty Guacamole

- 2 medium to large ripe avocados, cut in half, pitted
- Grated peel and juice of 1/2 lemon (1 1/2 tablespoons juice)
- 3 tablespoons chopped green onion
- 2 tablespoons coarsely chopped cilantro leaves
- 2 tablespoons bottled salsa or a few drops of hot red pepper sauce
- 1/4 teaspoon garlic salt

With spoon, scoop avocado pulp into a bowl. With a fork, coarsely mash avocado with lemon peel and juice. Stir in remaining ingredients. Cover and chill briefly or serve at room temperature. Serve as a dip with assorted raw vegetables such as cauliflower, cucumbers, sweet bell peppers and zucchini or baked tortilla chips. Makes about 1 1/2 cups.

### Virginia Fried Quail

- 3/4 cup flour
- Salt and pepper
- 8 whole dressed quail, split in half
- 1/4 cup butter or margarine
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped onion
- 1/2 cup sliced fresh mushrooms

- 2/3 cup water
- 1 can (5 ounces) evaporated milk
- 1 teaspoon instant chicken bouillon granules

In a large plastic food storage bag, combine flour, salt and pepper. Add quail halves, several at a time, and shake to coat. In a large 12-inch skillet, melt butter over medium heat. Add quail halves, skin side down, and cover. Cook for 25 to 30 minutes or until meat is fork tender and juices run clear, turning birds occasionally. Transfer quail halves to warm platter and cover to keep warm; set aside. To drippings in skillet, add onion and mushrooms. Cook 2 to 3 minutes or until tender, stirring frequently. Add water and stir to loosen browned bits in skillet. Add milk and bouillon granules. Cook for 1 to 2 minutes or until mixture begins to bubble, stirring constantly. Return quail halves to skillet. Stir to coat. Serve quail with hot cooked rice. Allow 2 whole quail per person.

### Carrots Almondine

- 1 pound carrots, peeled and thinly sliced
- 1 1/4 cup golden raisins
- 1 1/4 cup butter or margarine
- 3 tablespoons honey
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- 1 1/4 teaspoon ground ginger
- 1/4 cup sliced almonds

Cook carrots, covered in 1/2-inch boiling water 8 minutes; drain. Turn carrots into a 1-quart baking dish. Stir in raisins, butter, honey, lemon juice and ginger. Bake, uncovered, in a preheated 375° oven for 35 minutes, stirring occasionally. Spoon into serving bowl and sprinkle with almonds. Serves 4.

### Spinach Salad with Pears and Blue Cheese

- 1 tablespoon red wine vinegar
- 2 teaspoons red vermouth

- 5 tablespoons safflower oil
- Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

- 3/4 pound spinach leaves, trimmed and torn into bite-size pieces
- 1/2 cup crumbled blue cheese
- 1 large firm but ripe pear, such as d'Anjou, cored, halved and thinly sliced

Whisk the vinegar, vermouth and oil in a bowl; season with salt and pepper to taste. Mix the spinach and blue cheese in a large bowl; add the pear slices and pour over the dressing. Toss carefully and serve. Makes 4 servings.

### Banana Cake with Raspberry Glaze

- 2 ripe, medium bananas
- 3/4 cup chopped dates
- 1/2 cup chopped almonds
- 1 1/2 cups flour, divided
- 1 1/2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/4 teaspoon ground nutmeg
- 1/2 cup butter or margarine, softened
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 eggs
- 1 teaspoon rum or vanilla extract
- 1/4 cup raspberry jelly, melted

Place bananas in blender or food processor container. Cover and blend until smooth (about 3/4 cup). Toss dates and almonds with 1 tablespoon flour in small bowl; set aside. Combine remaining flour, baking powder, cinnamon and nutmeg in medium bowl. Beat butter with sugar until light and fluffy. Beat in eggs. Alternately stir in flour mixture and bananas. Stir in date mixture and rum extract. Turn into greased 8-inch square baking pan. Bake in a preheated 350° oven for 45 to 50 minutes or until toothpick inserted in center comes out clean. Poke holes in cake with fork and spread jelly over cake. Cool. Makes 9 servings. □

# SEPTEMBER *Afield*

by Jack Randolph

When September arrives we somehow believe that summer is over and autumn is here. We should stop fooling ourselves. By a score of 24 days to 6 September is a summer month. Dove season opens during the summer. Rail season opens during the summer. Resident Canada goose season opens during the summer. Squirrel season opens during the summer. In September it must happen on September 24 or later if it is to officially happen in autumn.

This month the full moon comes on the 17th. According to some schools of thought the full moon that arrives closest to the autumn equinox is the Harvest Moon. The autumn equinox takes place on September 24. The full moon in October is October 16, ergo the September full moon is the Harvest Moon. (There is, of course, another school of thought that has the first full moon after the autumn equinox as the Harvest Moon, but we'll not use that theory because if September's full moon is the Harvest Moon, the full moon in October is clearly the Hunter's Moon and we like it that way.)

So many things happen this month one can hardly keep up with them. We have National Hunting and Fishing Day, the Big Game Trophy Shows and the State Fair. We have the opening of the dove season, the rail season and the early squirrel season. We also have the relatively new season for hunting resident Canada geese, which, this year, with some minor exceptions, is open statewide.

Last year we had something unusual — a spate of northern pike action at Lake Moomaw. During the last week of the month a few anglers caught several nice northern pike, one as heavy as 13½ pounds, near the Fortney Boat Ramp. Strangely,

there has hardly been any notice of northerns since then.

Last year in September, Briery Creek Lake yielded a 12¾ pound bass. Come to think of it September can be a powerful bass month, particularly if we get one of those little periods of chilly weather that remind us that autumn is coming. Man, does a drop in temperature turn on those fish!

The days have been growing shorter since the first day of summer back in June. On the first day of September sunrise doesn't happen until after 6:30 a.m. and sunset happens a little after 7:30 p.m. These shorter days, called "photo periods" by some scientists, send signals to migratory critters. Spadefish bug out by mid-month and such species as croakers and spot move out of the rivers and down the bay. These fish have reached their prime for the year and this is the time to catch a mess for the freezer or to salt down. Last year in September in Rudee Inlet eight spot weighing a pound or more were caught. Flounder also respond to the shorter days and cooling water. The Small Boat Channel between the First Island and the Norfolk Shore at the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel is a well known ambush site to catch these autumn migrants.

Keep an eye on the Eastern Shore surf for red drum or channel bass. Last year the fishing for big drum in these waters was red hot during the latter part of the month. This is also prime time for speckled trout, but they have been so scarce this year that few anglers harbor high expectations.

Offshore, September often offers the best white marlin fishing of the season. In recent years in September offshore anglers have had to contend with hurricanes. Last year's storms, Hortense and Fran, didn't

hit us head on, but they created enough rough water to keep the boat in their berth.

One of the strange phenomena of September is the way the number of fishermen drop off after Labor Day. For many of us, Labor Day signals the beginning of the fishing season, not the end of it. Although the vacation season is generally over and the kids are back in school, weekend outings to local fresh or saltwaters can be very productive and the temperature is usually much more pleasant.

Hunters will be well advised to take a close look at the 1997-98 game law booklet. There are some changes this year, particularly as the laws relate to daily and seasonal limits for deer.

With the resident Canada goose season open throughout most of the month we may witness hunters and anglers competing for the same bit of water. Inasmuch as there was no season for migratory Canada geese last year and one may not be permitted this year, the September hunt may well be the only opportunity to hunt Canada geese waterfowl hunters will have this year. For this reason boaters and fishermen should cut the hunters a little slack and let them do their thing.

Youngsters, hoping to hunt for the first time this year will have to attend a hunter safety course. This is something that should not be put off until the last minute. Sometimes a youngster can't find a course in his area at the very last minute and, even if he does, it is likely that the class will be full.

Speaking of procrastinating, if that gun that needed repair isn't fixed by now, you had better hustle to the closest gunsmith right now. This is a busy time for gunsmiths and often they are so busy they cannot repair your gun before you need it. □



# Photo TipS

By Lynda Richardson

## Let It Rain

I was so absorbed in the great egret before me that I didn't notice the temperature drop. Despite my increased efforts at wiping the hair from my eyes, I didn't even realize that the wind had picked up. It wasn't until a loud growl from the darkening sky caught my attention and by then, it was too late. Cold, fat drops splattered on my head and arms. As they hit faster and faster, I became aware of my predicament. With all my heavy, expensive, camera equipment, I was a very long way from the car.

Glancing around, I noticed a line of thick shrubbery along the creek where I'd been photographing. I pulled the camera bag onto my shoulders and grabbed the tripod with its camera and 500mm lense and moved as fast as I could. Pushing through the stiff, scratchy branches I paused before entering. Hmmmmm, no snakes, a few spiders, no wasp nests, and it seemed fairly dry...so far. I crawled into the scrub shelter and hunkered down. Setting the tripod in front of me, I slid the camera bag from my back. Miraculously, I had a "just in case of a rain storm" plastic poncho which I'd purchased years earlier on a rainy trip to the San Diego Zoo. I pulled it out and placed it over my tripod, lens and camera securing it with a little duct tape. Once covered I relaxed but continued to dig through the bag for the large plastic garbage bag also included for such emergencies. In went the camera bag, twist tied and duct taped away from inclement weather.

As I settled in for the storm I began to feel the cool rain gently

penetrate my leafy shelter. Curious as to how long I might have to remain under cover, I peered out through prickly branches. The rain continued smashing wet bombs onto the creek's surface like rocks thrown harshly into a pond. My shirt was getting wetter and wetter and I tried to imagine myself an animal, a fox or deer, hiding under the bushes during a rain storm. But the more I thought about it the dumber it seemed. What does rain matter to animals? Don't most just go about

Slowly, I inched over to my tripod and pulled up the poncho protecting it. I checked to make sure the plastic wasn't covering the front of the lens and added duct tape to secure it around the lens opening. Taking a light reading I adjusted the f-stop and shutter speed. There wasn't enough light to stop the action of the falling rain with my 50 ISO film but with careful timing I could catch a sharp image of the egret during a moment of hesitation possibly recording the rain hitting the water around him.

Since my experience with the storm, I have found that photographing in wet weather can produce some interesting and beautiful photographs. You usually don't see pictures of wildlife in the rain because people just don't go out in it. But I figure as long as there isn't lightning and you're not shooting from beneath a tall tree or the top of a building, you should be relatively safe during a storm. And if you

always carry a few large plastic garbage bags and a poncho, at least you and your equipment will stay dry. For those planned rain excursions, Gortex rain gear, including pants and a jacket, can keep you quite comfortable. On warm rainy days, take along a friend and ask them to hold an umbrella while you shoot. If you need additional protection for your camera a zip-lock plastic bag works wonders.

So let it rain! By experimenting with your camera in wet weather, you should improve your photographic skills and enrich your knowledge of the lives of wild creatures.



*This great egret paused just long enough for me to capture him during a rain storm. Photo ©Lynda Richardson.*

their daily activities during a storm and dry off later. It's not like they can change their clothes.

Scanning the opposite bank I noticed the same egret I'd been photographing earlier. He was back, just as cautious and graceful, only now pounded by rain as he moved slowly along the bank hunting for a meal. It was a strange sight. Rain drops fiercely beating the water while the egret appeared unscathed. His natural rain coat of oiled feathers was the perfect poncho. I had to shoot some pictures.



by Col. William Antozzi, Boating Safety Officer

## Boat Handling

**B**oat operators who understand how their boats handle in different circumstances will be better able to respond appropriately in an emergency situation on the water. Knowing how long it takes to stop your boat, how it turns, and how it operates in reverse are major factors in preventing accidents. In the following paragraphs are some suggestions about boat handling and how to test your boat's handling features.

Boat stopping distance is something every boat operator should know. To learn the distance needed to stop your boat, you would test their boat in a clear area, away from boat traffic. Find a buoy, pile or other fixed marker in the area that can be used as a basis for measurement. Bring the boat to full speed and as the boat passes the fixed marker, cut the throttle. Observe the distance required for the boat to drop from full speed to being dead in the water. This should be done several times to take an average of the distance, while becoming familiar with recognizing the distance visually. The operator may also want to time how long it takes to bring the boat to a stop at different speeds. Knowing the stopping distance makes any operator more competent and confident on the water. An operator who understands the stopping distance of her/his boat will be more likely to avoid potential accidents.

I once observed a boat operator clip nine other boats when turning into a marina. His stern swung wide, and he did not compensate for this. Turning a boat is very different from turning a car. When one turns an automobile, the front of the car turns right or left and the rear follows. When a boat turns to either

side, propeller thrust is no longer parallel to the boat's center line and the stern swings wide. This must be taken into consideration or the boat will clip or bump into moored boats, scrape against pilings or get into other difficulties.

To check your boat's handling characteristics on turns, pilot the boat past a marker at different speeds, beginning a turn as the marker is passed. Make fairly gentle turns in both directions (left and right) before trying sharper turns. Be sure you don't lose control. This will give you a good idea about how your boat handles turning at different speeds. Next time you need to

pears to make the stern sink deeper into the water, while the bow rises out of the water. The bow tends to swing away from the line of travel.

It is a good idea to ask passengers to move forward before reversing because their weight will help bring the bow deeper into the water. Be careful not to operate with too much speed when reversing into waves; the water may flood the transom. Remember, it is possible to split or tear-out the transom if a submerged obstacle is encountered while reversing. There is no tilt feature to absorb the impact on an outboard motor going in reverse, unlike an outboard motor moving forward.



turn quickly, you will know what to expect.

Reverse is another part of boat handling that many boaters find challenging. Most boats are not made to run effectively in reverse. When a boat "backs down" or reverses, the turbulence of the water whirling around the transom ap-

Operators should be able to make snap decisions about stopping, turning, reversing or doing combinations of these to avoid an accident. It is important to know how your boat handles for when the unusual situation arises. Prepared and knowledgeable operators will be more likely to avoid an accident. □





©Dwight Dyke

# Game wardens love to talk fishin'

Whether it's Virginia's native trout fishery, the "put-n-take" fishery, or the enhanced opportunities of fee fishing, there is a trout fishing opportunity that's right for you. Virginia's game wardens do their part to help ensure that everyone has good opportunities to fish by keeping a steady schedule of angler contacts.

Here, Officer George Conley talks fishing while checking licenses at Big Tumbling Creek on the Clinch Mountain Wildlife Management Area in Smyth County, Virginia.



# National Hunting and Fishing Day September 27, 1997

